10¢

TEXAS RANGERS

JUNE

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

BEST ACTION WESTERN STORIES

GUN GOVERNOR

A Complete Jim Hatfield Novel
By JACKSON COLE

A PARD FOR PEDRO

By CLIFF WALTERS

BUY WAR BONDS AND STAMPS FOR VICTORY!

LIGHTER MOMENTS with fresh Dated Eveready Batteries

"See, Fido! Like this!"

"Keep your eye on the Infantry—the doughboy does it!" Work for victory and spend your earnings on War Bonds.

"EVEREADY" flashlight batteries are playing a vital role in this global war. The Army, Navy, Marines and essential war industries require nearly our entire production of these dependable, long life batteries. Obviously, that leaves a very limited supply for civilians.

However, important new developments have been made in "Eveready" flashlight batteries. As soon as the war is over you will get all the batteries you need and they will be even better and more serviceable than their pre-war predecessors.

Fresh DATED BATTERIES Last Longer
Look for the date line

EVEREADY
TRADE-MARK

The registered trade-mark "Eveready" distinguishes products of National Carbon Company, Inc.

To People Who Want to Write
but can't get started

Beginner Earns $1,819.00

"Today I received a check for $165 for a story. Another I sold for $34. The other day I counted up just how much I made previously. It amounted to $1,620.00. Not bad for a beginner, is it?"—Mrs. L. L. Gray, 579 E. McHarg Ave., Stamford, Texas.

Bus Driver Sells 8 Stories

"Since reporting the sale of my first attempt at a magazine article, I have sold three others. Also four feature stories were accepted by the local newspaper. The credit is all yours. When you consider that I'm a driver for the local bus company, you can readily see my time is well taken up."—Herman R. Bach, Box 113, Pacific Grove, Cal.

Do you have the constant urge to write but the fear that a beginner hasn't a chance? Then listen to what the editor of *Liberty* said on this subject:

"There is more room for newcomers in the writing field today than ever before. Some of the greatest of writing men and women have passed from the scene in recent years. Who will take their places? Who will be the new Robert W. Chambers, Edgar Wallace, Rudyard Kipling? Fame, riches and the happiness of achievement await the new men and women of power."

Writing Aptitude Test — FREE!

THE Newspaper Institute of America offers a FREE Writing Aptitude Test. Its object is to discover new recruits for the army of men and women who add to their income by fiction and article writing.

The Writing Aptitude Test is a simple but expert analysis of your latent ability, your powers of observation, imagination, dramatic instinct, etc. Not all applicants pass this test. Those who do are qualified to take the famous N.I.A. course based on the *practical* training given by big metropolitan dailies.

This is the New York Copy Desk Method which teaches you to write by writing! You develop your *individual* style instead of trying to copy that of others.

You "cover" actual assignments such as metropolitan reporters get. Although you work at home, on your own time, you are constantly guided by experienced writers. It is really fascinating work. Each week you see new progress. In a matter of months you can acquire the coveted "professional" touch. Then you're ready for market with greatly improved chances of making sales.

Mail the Coupon Now

But the first step is to take the Writing Aptitude Test. It requires but a few minutes and costs nothing. So mail the coupon now! Make the first move towards the most enjoyable and profitable occupation—writing for publication! Newspaper Institute of America, One Park Avenue, New York 16, N. Y. (Founded 1925)

NOTICE TO CANADIANS

Newspaper Institute's operations in Canada have been approved by the Foreign Exchange Control Board, and to facilitate all financial transactions, a special permit has been assigned to their account with The Canadian Bank of Commerce, Montreal.

Free

Newspaper Institute of America
One Park Ave., New York 16, N. Y.

Send me, without cost or obligation, your Writing Aptitude Test and further information about writing for profit.

Miss / Mrs. / Mr. .....

Address.....

(All correspondence confidential. No salesman will call on you.) 94-H-665

Copyright 1945 Newspaper Institute of America

TO OUR READERS: Our new easy-to-read space-saving type conserves paper in conformity with government rationing—but there is NO REDUCTION in reading matter.

TEXAS RANGERS

Vol. 20, No. 3 Every Story Brand New June, 1945

Coming in the Next Issue

JIM HATFIELD
IN
PIRATES ON HORSEBACK
An Exciting Complete Action-Packed Novel
By
JACKSON COLE

•

Plus Other Smashing Action Stories

A COMPLETE JIM HATFIELD ACTION NOVEL

GUN GOVERNOR

By JACKSON COLE

When Preying Carpet-Baggers Stalk the Texas Panhandle, a Daredevil Ranger Battles to Bring Gunpowder Law to Bear on Vicious Forces that Threaten the Lives and Property of Hard-Working Ranchers!... 11

Quick-Trigger Short Stories

VOICE FROM BOOTHILL ..... Gunnison Steele 57
Like a Message from Kirby Grant's Murdered Brother Came the Sudden Warning

SALVAGE OF THE BOX M. . J. R. Jackson 60
Cherub and Joanie Michelson, Orphans, Sure Take on a Big Job!

A PARD FOR PEDRO ..... Cliff Walters 65
Wandering Pedro Trujillo Finally Finds a Home —and the Chance for a Showdown

A Department

THE FRONTIER POST ..... Captain Starr 6
A Friendly Gab-fest About the West

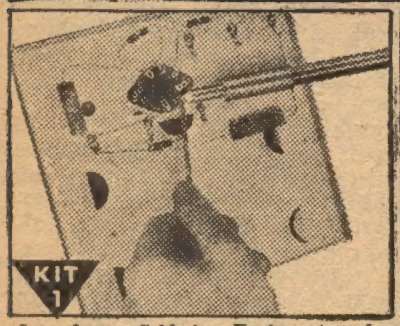
TEXAS RANGERS published every other month by Better Publications, Inc., at 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Subscription (12 issues), $1.20; single copies, $.10. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. Re-entered as second-class matter August 24, 1938, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1945, by Better Publications, Inc. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any real person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. In corresponding with this publication, please include your postal zone number, if any.

Read our companion magazines: Popular Western, Thrilling Mystery Novel, Thrilling Western, Thrilling Detective, Thrilling Love, The Phantom Detective, Sky Fighters, Popular Detective, Thrilling Ranch Stories, Thrilling Sports, Popular Sports Magazine, Range Riders Western, Thrilling Wonder Stories, Everyday Astrology, G-Men Detective, Detective Novel Magazine, Black Book Detective, Masked Rider Western, West, The Rio Kid Western, Startling Stories, Air War, Exciting Western, Popular Love, Exciting Love, Thrilling Football, Army Navy Flying Stories, Rodeo Romances, and Exciting Sports.

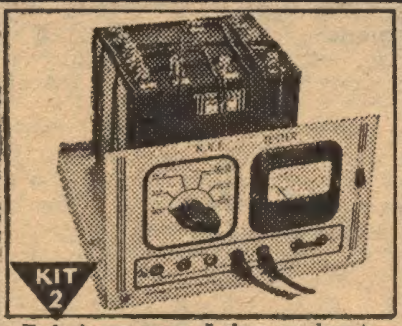
PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

I Will Show You How to Learn RADIO by Practicing in Spare Time

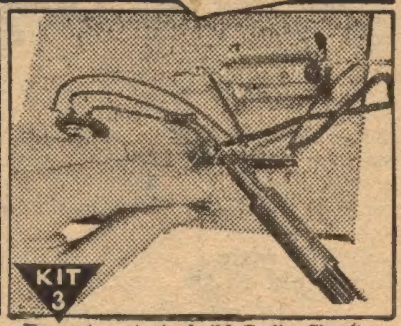
I Send You 6 Big Kits of Radio Parts



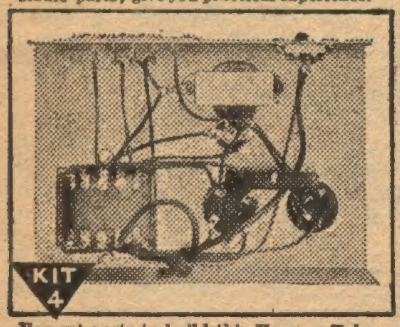
I send you Soldering Equipment and Radio Parts; show you how to do Radio soldering; how to mount and connect Radio parts; give you practical experience.



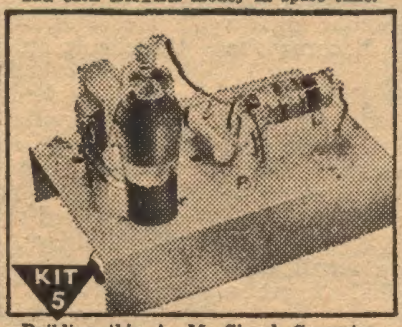
Early in my course I show you how to build this N.R.I. Tester with parts I send. It soon helps you fix neighborhood Radios and earn EXTRA money in spare time.



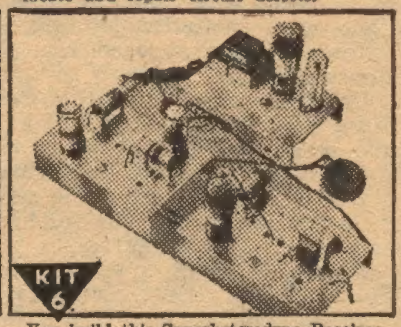
You get parts to build Radio Circuits; then test them; see how they work; learn how to design special circuits; how to locate and repair circuit defects.



You get parts to build this Vacuum Tube Power Pack; make changes which give you experience with packs of many kinds; learn to correct power pack troubles.



Building this A. M. Signal Generator gives you more valuable experience. It provides amplitude-modulated signals for many tests and experiments.



You build this Superheterodyne Receiver which brings in local and distant stations—and gives you more experience to help you win success in Radio.

KNOW RADIO—*Win Success*

I Will Train You at Home

Send the coupon for my FREE 64-page book, "Win Rich Rewards in Radio." See how knowing Radio can give you security, a prosperous future. Read how N.R.I. trains you at home. Read how you practice building, testing, repairing Radios with SIX BIG KITS of Radio Parts I send you.

Future for Trained Men Is Bright in Radio, Television, Electronics

The Radio Repair business is booming NOW. Fixing Radios pays good money as a spare time or full time business. Trained Radio Technicians also find wide-open opportunities in Police, Aviation, Marine Radio, in Broadcasting, Radio Manufacturing, Public Address work, etc. Think of the boom coming when new Radios can be made! Think of even greater opportunities when Television, FM, Electronics, can be offered to the public!

My Course Includes Training in TELEVISION • ELECTRONICS FREQUENCY MODULATION

Many Beginners Soon Make $5, $10 a Week EXTRA in Spare Time

The day you enroll I start sending EXTRA MONEY JOB SHEETS to help you make EXTRA money fixing Radios in spare time while learning. MAIL COUPON for FREE 64-page book. It's packed with facts about opportunities for you. Read about my Course. Read letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing, earning. MAIL COUPON in envelope or paste on penny postal. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 5F09, National Radio Institute, *Pioneer Home Study Radio School*, Washington 9, D. C.

Our 31st Year of Training Men for Success in Radio

Mail this--64 page book FREE

MR. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 5F09
National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C.

Mail me FREE, without obligation, your 64-page book: "Win Rich Rewards in Radio." (No salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

Name .....Age .....

Address .....

City .....Zone .....State .....

HIYA, gals and galluses! You all ever hear about the Texas bandit that became a Governor? In a get-together on these pages awhile back I promised to tell you—about him. It's no wild pioneer yarn. It's a true story of early Texas, with historical records to back it up from start to finish.

Destiny never gave a stranger twist to any man's career. While other outlaws were shot or hanged, this one rose in power, and even in respect in the community where he depredated. He even defeated a force of Rangers sent out with a pair of cannon to wipe his stronghold off the map.

The Red Robber

Red Robber of the Rio Grande was what folks called this Don Juan Nepomuceno Cortinas, who was a law-abiding rancher until a trifling dispute aroused him to become the Robin Hood of Texas.

Cortinas was called the Red Robber because he wore a flaming red beard. His rancho was a few miles west of Brownsville. Perhaps history would never have heard about him if he hadn't ridden one summer morning in 1859 into Brownsville for his morning *cafe con leche*, early breakfast.

From his table in front of a small cafe Cortinas saw the Town Marshal arrest a drunken peon.

Nothing unusual in such a scene.

Being of the land-owner class, Cortinas probably gave it little heed.

That is, not until he recognized the peon, who formerly had been his servant.

So Cortinas got up and went over to the Marshal, who seemed more abusive than circumstances called for, and Cortinas said so.

The Marshal cussed Cortinas, using words that were insulting. Cortinas, a man of honor, shot the Marshal in the shoulder. Then he took the beaten peon up behind him on his horse and dusted out of Brownsville.

Angered by Injustice

The incident might yet have not had serious consequences. Except that Cortinas didn't get over being mad. He resented the treatment in general that Mexicans were receiving at the hands of a clique of non-Latin politicians. One of the injustices that rankled him was the confiscation of desirable ranch lands held by Mexicans under old Spanish land grants. The law was being manipulated to cheat them of such property.

So Cortinas issued a manifesto saying he intended to abolish these practices, and would use such force as required for the job.

He did. About two months after he shot the Marshal, he raided Brownsville with about one hundred hard-riding followers. They stormed into the town at night, shooting and whooping.

They tore through the streets, sacked stores, emptied the jail of prisoners and killed five citizens who resisted them. Cortinas hunted for the Marshal but the latter remained prudently out of sight, even when Cortinas' followers rioted and caroused in the public plaza.

They had the town cowed and terrorized and kept citizens indoors until some Mexican officials persuaded Cortinas to withdraw.

Champion of the Oppressed

He returned to his ranch, declaring himself the champion of oppressed landholders. Mexicans that had suffered the loss of all they owned flocked to his support.

Brownsville did not share their enthusiasm for their spirited leader. The Cortinas ranch was only about seven miles out of town, a little too close for comfort. Especially for the comfort of crooked lawyers and corrupt office-holders.

So they organized a local militia called the Brownsville Tigers. They heeled themselves with everything from pistols to brass artillery. They climbed into uniforms and devised banners and started a march on the Cortinas ranch.

It wasn't any blitz affair. It took the Brownsville Tigers a week to cover that seven miles. When they reached the Cortinas place, they were met with a volley of gunfire from the chaparral.

Quick Retreat

They broke and ran. They got back to Brownsville a heap faster than they had come, even abandoning their artillery in the high-tailed retreat.

It was uncomfortably evident that corralling Cortinas wasn't going to be any cinch.

While Brownsville held indignation meetings and pawed the air helplessly, Cortinas held up the mail stage. He kept the driver captive ten days while all the letters were read to him.

That gave him a pretty good idea of who his enemies were. After digesting the correspondence, the bandit leader had the letters

(Continued on page 75)

IMAGINE THEIR JOY

WHEN THEY FOUND THEY COULD PLAY

This easy as A.B.C. way!

PLAYS ON RADIO

"As a proud student I can't keep from telling you that as a result of my course I have a good position playing from KTHS, Hot Springs, Ark., every morning."

*J. S., Okla.

LEARNED QUICKLY AT HOME

"I didn't dream I could actually learn to play without a teacher. Now, when I play for people they hardly believe that I learned to play so well in so short a time."

*H. C., S., Calif.

WOULDN'T TAKE $1000 FOR COURSE

"The lessons are so simple that anyone can understand them. I have learned to play by note in a little more than a month. I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for my course."

*S. E. A., Kansas City, Mo.

PLAYS AT DANCES

"I have completed your course and your lessons have been most satisfactory. I can play all of the popular songs. I have also earned money playing at dances."

*E. N. J., New York.

"YOU CAN'T BEAT IT!"

"I am glad to tell anyone about the U. S. School. It is just what they say it is and they will do what they say they will. If you want to learn music you can't beat it!"

*W. E. D., N. Mex.

Thousands Have Learned to Play for Less Than 7c a Day

WHAT instrument would you like to play? We'll show you how you can learn to play it—quickly, easily, in spare time at home for less than SEVEN CENTS A DAY! Never mind if you don't know one note of music from another—don't worry about "special talent."

The truth of the matter is that thousands now play who never thought they could! Yes, men and women everywhere are enjoying the thrilling satisfaction of playing the piano, violin, guitar, saxophone or other favorite instrument. Some of them are playing in orchestras and over the radio; others are teaching music, making money in spare or full time. And thousands are playing for their own enjoyment and the entertainment of their friends.

It all came about when they wrote to the U. S. School of Music for the Free Booklet that shows you how EASY it is to learn music at home this modern way. No tedious scales, no tiresome exercises. You learn to play by playing—start right in almost at once with the melody of a simple tune! It takes only a few minutes a day and the cost is trifling; you save the expense of a private teacher. Does it sound too good to be true? Mail the coupon and get the FREE PROOF! (Our forty-seventh year—Est. 1898.) U. S. School of Music, 2946 Brunswick Bldg., New York 10, N. Y.

NOTICE

Please do not confuse the U. S. School of Music method with any system of teaching music "by ear" or by trick charts. Our method teaches you to play by actual notes . . . not by any "trick" or number system. You are able to pick up any piece of regular sheet music and play by note. And once you've learned to play by note it's just like learning your A-B-C's. It never leaves you—you remember it for life.

SEND FOR FREE ➡ PRINT AND PICTURE SAMPLE

● You'll open your eyes when you find how quickly and easily you can learn to play your favorite instrument. Don't doubt; don't hesitate. Send for the fascinating illustrated booklet that answers all your questions; let the free Print and Picture Sample show you how this method actually works. If interested, mail the coupon NOW.

**Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by professional models.*

SUCCESSFUL 47TH YEAR

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC
2946 Brunswick Bldg., New York 10, N. Y.

I am interested in music study, particularly in the instrument checked below. Please send me your free illustrated booklet, "How to Learn Music at Home."

Piano	Saxophone	Modern Elementary Harmony
Guitar	Trumpet, Cornet	Clarinet
Hawaiian Guitar	Reed Organ	Practical Finger Control
Violin	Tenor Banjo	Other Instrument
Piano Accordion	Mandolin	

Have you Instrument? .....

Name .....
(Please Print)

Address .....

City ..... State .....

NOTE: If you are under 16 years parent must sign coupon.

Save 2c—Stick coupon on penny postcard.

EVERY ELECTRICAL WORKER NEEDS THIS

ELECTRICIANS 1945 HAND BOOK

For Everyday Help On The Job!

Brand new . . . up to the minute. Contains over 5,000 electrical facts—wiring diagrams—essential electrical formulas — latest code rules, tables, charts and wiring methods. Includes Industrial Electronics data. It's a gold-mine of practical, down-to-earth helps and ideas to save you time and money. A book every Electrical Worker can use every day. Pocket size, 4½ by 7 inches, flexible leatherette cover to stand hard usage.

400 Pages

- Electrical Circuits
- Reading Wiring Diagrams
- Wiring Methods
- Motors
- Switching & Control
- Illumination
- Industrial Electronics, Etc.

SEE IT FREE!

See this book FREE for 7 days at my expense. If you decide you don't want to keep it, send it back and you owe nothing. If you keep the book you pay only $2.75 after 7 days' FREE examination.

FREE TRIAL COUPON

H. C. LEWIS, President
Coyne Electrical School, Dept. 55-T5
500 S. Paulina St., Chicago 12, Ill.

I want to see the New Coyne Electricians Handbook. Send me a copy for 7 days' FREE examination. If after 7 days I do not want the book I will return it and owe you nothing. If I keep it I will pay $2.75 within 7 days and the book is mine.

NAME ..... Age .....

ADDRESS .....

TOWN ..... Zone ..... STATE .....

☐ If you prefer to pay postman cash price shown above on delivery, check here. Same FREE examination & money back guarantee.

High School Course at Home

Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H.S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept. H-A58, Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37

Latest Styles
EYE GLASSES
ORDER BY MAIL
16 DAYS TRIAL
AS LOW AS $1.89 A PAIR

MONEY BACK Guarantee
Your money refunded if not entirely satisfied with glasses.

SEND NO MONEY
FREE Catalog and Eye Chart. Write today. Take advantage of big money savings. We repair broken glasses. Fill prescriptions.
MODERN STYLE SPECTACLES, INC.
53 W. Jackson Blvd., Dept. M-25, Chicago, Ill.

Hotels Call for Trained Men

You can qualify at home in spare time. Thousands of Lewis Graduates, both young and mature, holding preferred positions everywhere. Get out of routine work into this fast-growing field offering sound, substantial present and postwar opportunities, fine living, luxurious surroundings. Previous experience proved unnecessary. Registration in Lewis National Placement Service FREE of extra cost. Send today for Free Book.

LEWIS HOTEL TRAINING SCHOOL
Room DM-949 Washington 7, D. C.

Carry Victory in Your Basket!

EVERY time you go to the store take along a basket or a shopping bag or some permanent container, roomy enough to carry your purchases home *unwrapped.*

Under no circumstances ask for, or accept, unnecessary paper wrappings from the storekeeper.

Don't burn or ruin, waste or destroy a single scrap of paper around your home, store or office. Collect it, save it, and call your local salvage group. They will call for it if you ask them to.

Remember—every scrap of paper you *don't use,* and every scrap you *do save* means just so much more *ammunition* for Victory.

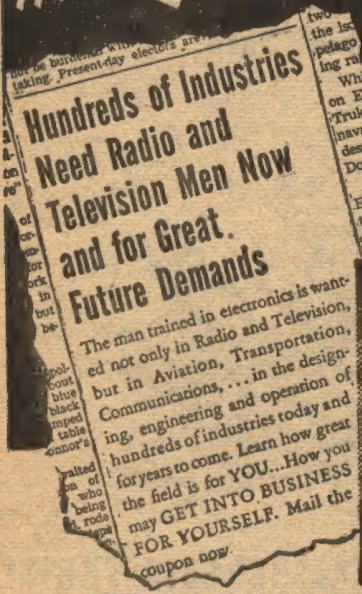
Get Back of the "Paper Holiday" in Your Community. *"Paper Holidays" are being conducted with great success by towns and cities the country over. Suggest one to the merchant you buy from, and your local municipal authorities.*

Remember—
PAPER IS WAR POWER

Use Less Paper—Save All Wastepaper

This advertisement contributed by this publication and prepared by the War Advertising Council in cooperation with the W.P.B. and the O.W.I.

GET INTO RADIO ELECTRONICS & TELEVISION NOW!


Hundreds of Industries Need Radio and Television Men Now and for Great Future Demands
The man trained in electronics is wanted not only in Radio and Television, but in Aviation, Transportation, Communications, . . . in the designing, engineering and operation of hundreds of industries today and for years to come. Learn how great the field is for YOU...How you may GET INTO BUSINESS FOR YOURSELF. Mail the coupon now.

Send for FREE Lesson and Prove to Yourself How Quick and Easy You Get Ahead in Radio by the NEW

SHOP METHOD HOME TRAINING

Learn by Doing!

Use real Radio Equipment Furnished with your Course

Experience is the best teacher. You learn by experience with the exclusive National Shop-Method of Home Training—actually build many circuits and do experiments with the big kits of standard radio parts included in your training equipment at no extra cost to you.

Build a superheterodyne receiver. Make tests and conduct experiments that show you the why and how of electronics. Build an audio oscillator, signal generators and other instruments with the parts and supplies included in your course.

"F. M." Means Future Money

Frequency Modulation (F. M.) is here to stay. Thousands of F. M. licenses have been granted by the government F. C. C. all over the country. Learn what this means to you.

Get ready for TELEVISION. Get your share of the RADIO SERVICE Business. Here is a sensationally improved way for you to get the right training—a thoroughly proved system whereby you study in spare time—odd hours, even minutes—and have the advantage of actual shop experience behind you.

This exclusive shop method of home training comes to you right from one of the world's greatest vocational educational centers—the resident training shops and experimental laboratories of National Schools. It is the sound, practical training based on actual experience of qualified instructors and engineers who have prepared thousands of National graduates now employed in the radio industry.

It is up-to-date—matches the progress constantly being made in modern radio, television and electronics. It is time tested. National Schools has been training men for higher pay and greater opportunity for more than a third of a century. Fill out and mail the coupon below for details.

Shop Method Training Wins Good Jobs

"My latest offer was $5,800.00 as Radio Photo Engineer . . . but I'm doing well where I am now engaged. I am deeply indebted to National."—Joseph Grumich, Lake Hiawatha, New Jersey.

"Due to my training at National I was selected to instruct in the laboratory work of Navy and Marines."—R. R. Wright, Blackfoot, Idaho.

"I believe National offers the best course to be had . . . Keep up the good work."—O. K. Ivey, Washington, D. C.

Read what hundreds of other enthusiastic students have written about National Training. Send in your coupon today.

Be Sure in Post-War

Now, right now, is the time to prepare for SUCCESS AND SECURITY in the great expansion after the war. The field is wide open. Trained men will get the preference in the broadcasting stations—in industry—will make quick progress with small capital in their own business. Soldiers, sailors and marines make use of your free time to get ready for the future. Study while still in uniform. Thousands of men in the armed forces have trained at National Schools under U. S. Government sponsorship.

See for Yourself

Now, right now, is the time to grasp the great opportunity of today—a successful career for tomorrow. Get into the big money, rapid advancement, a position of importance. A BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN. The industry is crying for trained men everywhere. A rapidly expanding business—probably the greatest in industrial history—holds out the promise of a rich future—prosperous security. But to win it you must be ready. Well-trained men ONLY are wanted.

Examine the National Shop Method of Home Training carefully. Be convinced. Study the lesson we will send you FREE. No obligation of any sort. Fill out the coupon and mail it today.

GET THESE 2 BIG BOOKS FREE!
Learn for yourself just how easy this SHOP METHOD HOME TRAINING gives you the practical, down-to-earth experience you can never get from theory alone.

NATIONAL SCHOOLS

LOS ANGELES 37, CALIFORNIA EST. 1905

MAIL OPPORTUNITY COUPON FOR QUICK ACTION

National Schools, Dept. 6-TG
4000 South Figueroa Street, Los Angeles 37, California
(Mail in envelope or paste on penny post card)

Mail me FREE the two books mentioned in your ad including a sample lesson of your course. I understand no salesman will call on me.

NAME .....AGE .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY .....STATE .....
Include your zone number

STERLING Silver-Plated SET OF 3 TEASPOONS

LOOK LADIES! . . . then act before the sell-out! Hurry!

Plated with Pure Sterling Silver on Reinforced Steel Base

POST PAID Limit of 2 Sets (6 Teaspoons) to a customer

50c **TAX FREE**

A REAL BARGAIN THRILL!

Think of it! 3 Sterling Silver Plated Teaspoons for only 50c Tax Free! Glorious Teaspoons of long-life quality, sparkling beauty and exquisite pattern designed to harmonize with any set you now own. Heavily silver plated overall. Unconditionally guaranteed to give satisfaction.

Mail This Coupon!

Sensational "Build-A-Set" Thrift Plan

★

STERLING Silver Plated Tableware to Match Teaspoons

★

Forks . . 3 for $1
Soup Spoons . 3 for $1
Knives . 2 for $1

NATIONAL NOVELTIES, Dept. TBVI
608 South Dearborn St.—Chicago 5, Ill.

Limit of 6 pieces of each to a customer.

I am enclosing payment in full for Sterling Silver Plated Tableware itemized below. Please rush Tax Free and Postpaid. Money back without question if dissatisfied.

____Teaspoons @ 3 for 50c ____Forks @ 3 for $1

____Soup Spoons @ 3 for $1 ____Knives @ 2 for $1

My total order amounts to $_____

Free Rogers Silver Polishing Cloth with Cash orders of $5 or more.

Name_____
(Please Print Clearly)

Address_____

City_____ State_____

Baldy toppled as the .45 caliber slug hit him (Chap. VII)

GUN GOVERNOR

By JACKSON COLE

When Preying Carpet-Baggers Stalk the Texas Panhandle, a Daredevil Ranger Battles to Bring Gunpowder Law to Bear on Vicious Forces that Threaten the Lives and Property of Hard-Working Ranchers!

CHAPTER I

Masters of the Range

RED DUST of the Panhandle rose slowly in the brassy hot sky, marking the back trail of the score of riders who had run a mustang bunch into a natural pen formed by ocher butte walls. The men were methodically roping the horses to lead them away.

The animals were not wild, but had been broken in by experts, and had simply been running loose to graze. Once caught, they were docile enough. Several had the beautiful lines of the long-legged Kentucky strain mingled with mustang. Such horses were valuable in Texas, so much cash on the hoof.

"Hey, Fuller!" warned a squat, ugly fellow. "Here comes old Goatbeard Crane and his son. He looks boilin' mad!"

The tall, thin, sallow man addressed turned washed-out blue eyes toward the pair of riders quirting in on them. He wore dirty trousers, a sweated shirt and a big brown Stetson. On his vest glinted a lawman's star.

At his signal the gang turned to face the father and son who had ridden up. The elder Crane was stout and substantial, and wore a gray beard. His face was red with anger.

A COMPLETE JIM HATFIELD NOVEL

"What's the meanin' of this, Fuller?" he shouted. "Them are my hosses!"

"Take it easy, Crane," warned Fuller "Yuh never paid yore tax that was assessed last month. We're collectin'."

"Why, yuh're hoss thieves, that's what yuh are!" exploded Crane. "That tax ain't legal. Doc Sayers has been robbin' us for years, and we ain't payin' him any more. Yuh wouldn't dare try this if Cap Meekham wasn't away!"

He was so angry that he kept sidling his horse closer and closer, shaking a heavy fist in Fuller's face.

"Look out, Pop!" suddenly screamed the youngster, who was some yards from the crowd. He was a slim lad of about sixteen, in overalls and a straw hat, which shaded a thin, eager face.

The ugly, square man who had warned Fuller, a man with shaved, malformed head and cruel little eyes, had given a raucous chuckle. Without further warning he pulled a Colt pistol and fired into Crane's side. The rancher stopped speaking, his mouth widening as he gasped for breath. He was mortally hit, and sagged off the startled horse.

The son sent a single shot from an old muzzle-loading pistol he carried, and as Fuller's men cursed and turned on him, he whipped his fast white mare around and, lying close to her curved neck, flew away in retreat, zigzagging like an Indian. They shot after him, and a bullet burned his arm, but he kept going, his bare heels drumming the mare's ribs.

His father lay on the ground, dead. Sheriff "Nip" Fuller stared at the body.

"What'd yuh kill the old sidewinder for, Greggs?" he growled. "Now he can't pay us no more taxes."

"Thunderation with these Rebs!" snarled the man called Greggs. "They need a lesson. He was resistin' arrest, wasn't he, and the law? That's excuse enough."

They collected the stolen horses, and rode off southward. . . .

SOME miles away, a young rancher of the neighborhood named Kenneth Toll looked back along the line of flat wagons, beside which he rode. Their axels were creaking from roped loads, as they came up the rise from the creek to the main street of Colt City. The Panhandle dust rolled from under the iron-hooped, slow-turning wheels. Horses and mules, six to a team, drew the vehicles.

"We're going to win!" thought Toll, and pride welled within him as he saw his project nearing a triumphant conclusion.

The great satisfaction he felt came because he had been of service to his fellows, these Texans with him whom he wished to help. For it had been a difficult time for them, former soldiers of the Confederacy, who were seeking to reconstruct their lives. Texas had fought on the wrong side, and erstwhile Rebels could not cast their ballots in elections.

Carpet-baggers had flooded the South, even to the far-off Texas Panhandle. They had placed their minions in office, levied taxes, and collected them with their officials. Behind the invaders had been the forces of occupation, troops in the South.

Ken Toll and his companions had picked up the big machines now in the flat wagons at rail-head seventy miles southeast of Colt City. All over the land, following the Civil War's end, steel lines had pushed out, carrying goods and equipment to pioneer communities, returning cattle and raw materials to Eastern markets.

"Cap" Meekham, leader of the ranchers with the wagon caravan, trotted his black gelding to Toll.

"We'll rest the hosses here in Colt City," he said. "And the boys want a snort at the Red Raven."

"Wouldn't it be better to go on through, Cap?" asked Toll. "We don't want any fuss with Doc Sayers and his gang here."

Meekham grinned. He was a big, good-looking, light-haired man with the gray hardly showing in the crisp bleached growth at his temples. He had a barrel chest, strong hands, and a snappy tongue which could lash men to action. He wore a gray shirt open at the throat, butternut-hued pants and heavy cavalry boots with silver spurs. His Colt was at his hip. Cocked on his head was a gray Stetson, the brim curved down on one side, jauntily up on the other.

He signaled with his arm, and the caravan stopped. Down the line a dozen riders came toward their chief, while men on the wagon seats slouched over the reins, waiting.

"Won't be any trouble, Toll," Meekham assured. "And soon we'll be rid of Sayers and his dirty vultures."

Among the horsemen were Meekham's two strapping sons, Vance and Tim. They had their father's proud look, though they were thinner than he, and had darker hair. Slouch hats with feathers in the bands, shaded their steady blue eyes, for the boys went in for decorative effects, decking themselves in trappings.

Vance, the elder son, now wore a purple shirt of which he was inordinately proud, while Tim sported fringed buckskin. They carried businesslike Colt revolvers.

Every one of the horsemen had a carbine slung under his leg, and the horses they rode had Kentucky strains, giving them greater

size and more beautiful lines than the usual mustang. Besides the Meekhams the others in the party were neighboring ranchers, their sons, and cowboys.

Toll had not been born among these people. He was a Northerner who had come to Texas because of a restless urge. His parents had been killed in a stunning accident and the shock had uprooted him from the Pennsylvania town which had been his home. He had inherited a small fortune, had turned it into cash and moved West. Texas promised new scenes, a new way of life.

He was in his early twenties, so had missed the War. Just as he had been ready to join the Army, Lee had surrendered.

He was a slender young man, with a wiry, tireless body. His hair was black, and his quick blue eyes showed his intense interest in life. By nature he was level-headed and earnest. He was a graduate of an agricultural school, where he had become fascinated by wheat, its growth and improvement. He had made work with the grain his specialty.

The soil in this section of the Panhandle was perfect for wheat, though Meekham and his neighbors as well as others had thought young Toll absurd, had laughed behind his back, when he had ploughed and planted and fenced. They had called him "that crazy Yankee." Toward him, a Northerner, they had turned suspicious, embittered eyes, for memories of the war still rankled. More so, because of the disfranchisement of the Southerners, and the occupying forces ready to punish former Rebels at the behest of the battening carpet-baggers.

Captain Zeb Meekham had ridden for Jeb Stuart. He had a forceful personality, and the others looked at him as leader.

It had been over a year from the time that Toll built his home in the district before Meekham and his friends had come to trust and admire him, to realize he had their interests at heart. June Meekham, Cap's daughter, had had something to do with their acceptance of Toll. But when they had come to know him they found him worthy of full affection and respect.

JIM HATFIELD

"Hey, there, Rebs!"

Sheriff Nip Fuller called to them gruffly from the shaded porch, as they dismounted and moved toward the saloon. "Mind yuh behave, now!"

THIN, tall, stooped, Fuller's skin was the color of old leather. His chin was weak, his eyes flickering. His stained trousers were tucked untidily into run-over half-boots, and his badge was pinned to a flapping vest.

Meekham had only contempt for this so-called lawman. He had been installed by Ru-

dolph Sayers, boss of the section, and was as much Sayers' man as was "Bullhead" Greggs, the ugly, square fellow with a shaved, knobby head whose cruel little eyes were now watching the ranchers with hate. They knew he was responsible for the stealing of their stock. Yet Greggs was backed by Fuller and Sayers and armed might, and there was nothing they could do.

As Toll, Meekham and his rancher neighbors trooped into the Red Raven, they saw "Doc" Sayers down the bar, with several of his cronies.

On an afternoon like this, Colt City was apparently a sleepy place, far removed from trouble and bustle. The wind stirred the dust but slightly, and the plaza, with its scrofulous growth of brush and stunted oaks, was a feeding ground for pigs, stray horses, and chickens belonging to the dwellers in the frame and adobe buildings. Sayers owned the main saloon in town, the Red Raven, a two storied place which served as a hotel. A hardware store, a grain and feed place, a few smaller enterprises, made up the business section of town.

But beneath this placid exterior, Colt City seethed with danger. Sayers had many followers, imported gunmen quick with pistol and temper. They lorded it over such men as Meekham.

Fuller and Greggs followed the dusty party inside, and stood observing them as they lined up at the bar. Outside, Greggs had signaled, and other men were hurrying toward the saloon in case of a fight.

Ken Toll was nervous. He would have preferred going straight through Colt City. He had felt all along that he was sitting on top of a powder magazine with the Texans' pride likely to explode at any moment, sparked by the truculence of Sayers' men.

Sayers leaned easily on the bar. He was a stout man, about six feet tall. He wore black trousers, shined new boots, a starched white shirt and black string tie. His curving nose was fat, his mouth, firm and thin-lipped, and his black hair was plastered to his great head by pomade. He had sharp gray eyes, one drooping in a permanent wink.

Toll knew, as did his companions, how craftily intelligent Sayers' evil mind was. But it had taken some time for Toll to realize the extent of Doc's power, for Sayers was not a man to thrust himself forward. Instead, he used Nip Fuller or Bullhead Greggs, or even imaginary figures to represent him. But now, after long observation, Meekham and Toll had learned that nothing could be accomplished in the bailiwick without Doc's say-so.

Whenever Cap Meekham and his men came to town, it was touch and go, for he and Sayers hated each other. However, the Texan was too shrewd to travel far without an escort. And Toll had learned, in order to save his friends from destruction, to say, "Don't give Doc Sayers the satisfaction of an excuse to attack you." This had been much more effective than to warn such a fearless man as Meekham that he might get hurt.

But today, Cap Meekham was grinning down the bar at Sayers.

"Afternoon, Reb," drawled Sayers, in his slow, deep voice. "Yuh seem mighty pleased with yoreself today. What's happened? Did Lee take New York?" Sayers' drooped eyelid fluttered, and his henchmen laughed raucously.

"I hear they found Jeb Stuart hiding in a Virginny cave!" shouted Nip Fuller.

The jibes didn't upset Meekham. He held his smile.

"I reckon yuh ain't read the latest news, Doc," he drawled. "Yore spy system's slippin'."

He drew a folded newspaper from his hip pocket, and slid it down the bar.

Toll nudged Meekham. "Let's get on home, Cap. We don't want any fuss. Remember, Sayers will enjoy it." He spoke in a low, urgent voice.

Meekham nodded, and downed his drink in a gulp.

"C'mon, boys," he said. "We got a lot of reconstructin' to do ourselves."

"Wait a jiffy, Meekham," ordered Sayers coldly. "Yuh ain't paid up that last tax levied."

"See yuh in court, Doc—if yuh got the nerve to show yore face there," interrupted Meekham. "The law's comin' back to Texas, and rascals like you better pack them carpet-bags fast, and dust."

Nip Fuller scowled. "Better watch yore tongue, Meekham, or yuh'll get what yore Cousin Crane did!"

There was a brief silence that might have been cut with a knife. Then Meekham, no longer smiling, demanded: "What did he get?"

"Bullets in the stomach!" snarled Bullhead Greggs.

Meekham swore as a red flush spread over his face. His teeth gritted.

"Yuh killed him, yuh thieves!"

"He resisted the law!" shouted Fuller.

FOR an instant it seemed to Ken Toll that a terrible battle was about to break out. Meekham was outnumbered but his men were cool, steady marksmen. Sayers knew it, too, and also realized he was close to Meekham, who could kill him before Meekham himself was downed.

"Please, Cap—come along," begged Toll.

With a mighty effort, Meekham held himself in, and Toll managed to herd his companions outside, to their horses.

Sayers trailed them out, and stood on the porch.

Without further warning the rider pulled a Colt pistol and fired into Crane's side (CHAP. I)

"Oh, Toll," he called. "I'd like to speak to yuh a minute."

Toll had mounted but turned his horse and rode over. The grim Texans waited.

Sayers' attitude toward Toll differed from his way with the Rebels. Toll was a Northerner, and had come with money. But the young man's friendliness with Meekham had not pleased the boss of Colt City.

"Yuh're a smart lad, Toll, in many ways," began Doc. "We thought yuh was a fool when yuh planted that wheat and talked the Rebs into doin' the same thing. But now—"

He shook the newspaper, unfolding it so Toll could read the headlines he already knew.

WHEAT JUMPS FIFTEEN CENTS MORE PER BUSHEL

There was another one which screamed:

FORCES OF OCCUPATION WITHDRAWING FROM SOUTH

Toll, Meekham and Sayers knew very well what that meant. Such scoundrels as Sayers, who had seized political dictatorship and with it the property and wealth of the disfranchised, would now be on their own. The carpet-baggers would be hard put to it to keep their dishonest gains.

"This is evidently good wheat country," observed Sayers. "And you fellows have planted thousands of acres. I thought yuh was loco when yuh put yore money into plough and machinery and barbed wire to keep out the cattle. But I was wrong."

Toll shrugged. He did not like Sayers, the slimy political boss of the section, but it was his nature to shy away from unnecessary trouble. He was wholly absorbed in his work, in growth and improvement of wheat.

"I've studied wheat for years, Sayers," he said. "I know soil and I know seed. That's all."

"Of course the Cuban War's been a help to yuh," said Sayers. "That's why the price keeps skyrocketin', like beef. You fellows ain't got much beef left, but yuh got lots of wheat."

Toll felt like saying, "You and your men stole our best cows," but he kept silent, as Sayers pursued his train of thought.

"How many bushels yuh figger on reapin', with them machines?" Doc asked in an offhand manner. "The grain's ripe, ain't it?"

"Yes, it's ripe. There should be a good yield."

Toll would not give Sayers exact information. With a short nod, he rejoined Meekham.

NEXT ISSUE'S NOVEL
PIRATES ON HORSEBACK

CHAPTER II

The White Gentlemen

IT WAS supper time when the travelers reached Meekham's ranch on Cottonwood Creek, after riding through a country vast in scope, rolling in great waves for hundreds of miles. Low growths of trees and brush bordered the waterways of the Brazos tributaries. To the west rose the escarpment of the Staked Plain, across whose hazy and mysterious reaches rode the Comanches and Apaches, using their secret water-holes and caves, to raid the settlements of west Texas, lower Kansas and Colorado. It was needful for the pioneer to be constantly alert against both red and white marauders.

In the rays of the setting sun, the wheat in the fields rustled, bending gracefully in the evening breeze. Long lines of barbed wire strung on poles surrounded the fields to keep out the grazing cattle and horses. Doc Sayers and his gang had stolen much of the stock these people had owned, had picked the best of it long ago. But there were some breeding cows and runts left, and their horses were guarded as carefully as possible.

As far as the eye could see the wheat grew. Line riders constantly circled the fences, to keep out domestic animals, and any stray buffalo herds which might approach.

Meekham's party had been away four days on the trip to the rail-head to fetch the reapers, but now they were home on Meekham's ranch. His ranchhouse was a large, roomy home built of native baked adobe brick and timber. It had been whitewashed and was well-kept, as were the barns and other buildings. Toll's wheat scheme had been a lifesaver for Meekham and his friends, although they had tried it as a last resort.

Mrs. Meekham, slim and dark of hair—she had been born in Virginia, and had met Meekham when he was a dashing young blade in Richmond for a visit before the awful war—greeted her husband and sons joyfully. With her were her two daughters, Becky, the fifteen-year-old, and June, who was twenty, with golden hair, and a strawberry-and-cream complexion from the winds and sun of the Panhandle.

June smiled at Kenneth Toll as he dismounted, and took her hand. She was in the first bloom of womanhood, strong and capable, a special fascination for a young man such as Toll.

"How did it go, Ken?" she asked. "We were hoping you'd be back before dark."

"Fine," he told her. "Wheat's gone up again. And the paper says that the soldiers are leaving."

"How wonderful!" June's long-lashed eyes sparkled with happiness and her hand answered Toll's pressure.

Some of Meekham's other neighbors were there, men whose homes were spread across the great new land. Their sons and helpers had gone to rail-head with Toll and Meekham after the reapers. Those older men also were formerly soldiers of the Confederacy, sturdy and proud, but impoverished by the War and its aftermath. There were Lees, Addisons, Jacksons, and other names of the old South.

Among those present was young Dan Crane, with his arm bandaged. He told Meekham how he had seen his father shot down in cold blood. He had come at once to the ranch, and they had given him aid and comfort, kept him there.

"Them killers'll pay for it," promised Cap Meekham, his eyes dark in anger.

The women had a hot meal ready, and the hungry men, after washing up at the pump, sat down to do it justice. Dark had fallen when later they collected, by lamplight, in Meekham's front room to hear what Ken Toll had to say.

"Wheat has jumped again," he told them eagerly, "and I believe it'll go even higher by the time we market our crop. The Cuban revolution's responsible, but we would have made a good profit anyway. That Polish seed has produced better than I hoped. I'm much pleased."

Toll's eyes showed his interest. They often teased him about his wheat, claiming that he loved it better than life itself.

"What yuh figger we'll be worth?" asked Sam Addison, one of the ranchers.

"I can't say to the dollar, but we should each make several thousands. Certainly enough to buy new land, horses and mules, machinery and seed, cattle—and with money to spare."

"Whew!" exclaimed Dave Jackson, a short, red-faced man whose ranch adjoined Meekham's. "I can't believe it! We're shore grateful to yuh, Toll."

"And he had to argue us into makin' our fortunes," Meekham grinned. "We got to admit we were donkeys at first, not takin' his word for it. We owe Toll a vote of thanks—to say nothin' of all the money he's put out to help us."

The praise pleased Toll. June was there and her face told how proud of him she was. Life seemed good, filled with happiness and interest. Ken Toll had gambled on these people and won for them. It was only human nature to be delighted when proved right. So Toll talked on, chiefly about the technique of reaping.

HE WAS interrupted by a sudden stir outside one of the windows. A string of oaths followed by a sharp pistol shot, sent Meekham streaking to the door a carbine in his hands.

"What's up out there?" he bawled.

"Hey, Dad! We done caught a sneakin' thief!"

Vance Meekham dragged in a frightened-eyed man in dusty range clothes. His hat was gone and a cut in the lip showed where Vance had hit him. The elder Meekham seized him by the scruff of the neck and shook him.

"It's Pinky Graham!" he exclaimed. "He rides for Sayers! What yuh doin' here, Pinky, yuh no-account rat."

The bony face twisted with fear. "Don't kill me, Meekham—don't kill me! Yuh'll get in trouble if you do!"

"Dry up." Meekham rattled Graham's teeth.

Tim Meekham and a couple of other young men entered, breathing hard from a run.

"Other one got away, Pop!" reported Tim.

"Pinky" Graham was in mortal terror of Meekham, the high-tempered chief of the Texans. Words spurted from his lips as Meekham shook him.

"Better be careful! Sayers sent us! Me'n Greggs. We ain't done any harm. Just listened to yore talk."

"Spyin', huh! I ought to bash yore brains out."

All the ranchers were furious. Toll alone started to intevene, but Meekham had no intention of killing Graham. After questioning him, learning that Bullhead Greggs and Pinky had crept in under an open window to hear what was being said inside, Cap ran the trembling spy outside, kicked him hard in the right place to start him running, and fired a couple of shots in the air to speed him on.

Toll spent the night at Meekham's. In the morning, he was making ready to return to his home, a few miles away, when a warning came in that a large party of men was approaching. Meekham and his sons, with some of Cap's cowboys and Toll, were lined up in the yard when Sheriff Nip Fuller, Bullhead Greggs, and a posse of thirty rode in.

Fuller stopped his horse, his men pushing up to stare at the Texans.

"Meekham," called the sheriff, "I got a warrant for yore arrest. I want you and yore two sons."

"For what?" snapped Cap.

"For a killin'. Yuh shot Pinky Graham last night."

"Huh!" snapped Meekham. "If Graham's dead, it's what he had comin'—like Bullhead and the rest of yuh, Fuller. But we didn't kill him."

"Witnesses swore they seen yuh shoot him down cold. Come along and don't make no fuss."

Meekham laughed. "I don't know what yore game is, but I wouldn't trust yuh even

when I'm lookin' at yuh through my gunsights, Fuller."

"Put that gun down and come with me!" ordered the lawman.

"We'll take yuh, Meekham, if yuh don't surrender," warned Greggs.

Meekham's hot eyes sought the ugly Bullhead.

"You shot down my cousin, Greggs," he accused. Yuh was here spyin' on us last night. Sayers sent yuh. Pinky said so before I let him go. If it's possible, yuh're worse than Fuller. I'll count five and if yuh ain't on yore way by then, we'll open fire."

Fifteen men faced Fuller's thirty, as Meekham began his slow, determined count.

"One—two—three—four—"

With a curse, Nip Fuller pulled his reins, and started away. Meekham's carbine was pointed straight at his chest. Greggs was no braver, in the face of such determination. He saw to it that he was in front so that the other men of the posse were between Meekham's guns and his own precious carcass.

As they fled, laughter came from Meekham and his men.

But Toll was worried. "What's the idea of this, Cap? They killed Pinky Graham, and blame it on you. Why?"

Meekham shrugged. "Have to ask Doc Sayers, I reckon."

Fuller and the posse drew up at a safe distance, and shook their fists back at the ranch. After a talk among themselves, they moved on, headed back to Colt City. Toll had that episode on his mind all day, trying to decide what it had all meant.

Ken Toll found his own home in good order. He had half a dozen men working for him in the fields, but the reaping would be a community effort, with Toll supervising. All would pitch in and get the crop in at one place, then move to the next.

After he had gone to bed that night, Toll was startled by the sound of many hoofs. He got up, went to a window, looking out at the moonlit plain south of his house. On a rise he saw strange figures framed against the sky, a line of riders in white hoods and capes which covered them from head to boots.

THE sight sent cold shivers up and down his spine as they moved on, westward. For Meekham's was in that direction.

Hastily pulling on his clothes and boots, he took his guns and roused his men. They rode out after the white-clad gang, but stealthily, for they were greatly outnumbered by the white riders. Coming up on one of the innumerable rises which were a feature of the country, they saw flames mounting to the sky.

"That's Steve Lee's!" he shouted over his shoulder. "C'mon!"

As they drove in, hoping to help their friend and neighbor, they saw the riders in the firelight. Lee's barn was afire. Gunshots rattled, and a man who had run into the light threw up his hands and sank to the warm red earth.

The white-clad horsemen were moving away. As Toll hurried up, he saw a woman crouched over Lee's body, heard the pitiful sobbing of a stricken wife.

He felt it vital to get ahead of the killers, to warn Meekham and others in their path. There was little to be done at Lee's so leaving some of his men to assist the dazed people there to put out the fire, he rode at full-tilt for the home of the girl he loved.

On an elevation to the south, something attracted his eye, something that flared with yellow intensity—a huge broken circle of flame.

Terror and death had struck the Panhandle range.

CHAPTER III

Off to the Panhandle

THERE was a desperate, imperative note in the voice of Captain McDowell, Chief of the Texas Rangers, as he gave his instructions, in his Austin headquarters.

"Hurry!"

Before the War, McDowell himself had ridden the wild trails taken by the Rangers, fighting the red savages and white outlaws of Texas. He had been a first-class officer, known for his high courage and great strength of mind and body.

Now the body had failed him, due to the passing of many years, but his brain was still as keen as ever, with the salty knowledge of long experience added. He had the Lone Star State's vast reaches at his fingertips, a mental picture of each huge section of the state he loved. He knew the colorful Border marked by the historic Rio Grande, the thorn jungles of the Nueces, the tropical Gulf Coast, the reaches of the central parts, the sandy stretches of the Red River valley in the north, the Trans-Pecos, high plateau semi-desert in parts, and haven of the outlaws. Last but not least, he knew the rolling Panhandle, bounded on the west by the Llano Estacadó or Staked Plain. Across it, in the first years of the newly discovered world, the Spanish padres had marched, staking the trail so they might find their way back over the illimitable expanses.

It was to the Panhandle that McDowell now was despatching his best officer, Jim Hatfield.

Frosty and grim of face, his rimmed eyebrows knitted in a frown, McDowell banged a gnarled fist on the desk.

"Texas must be lifted out of the pit into

which she's fallen!" he declaimed. "We got to show we can run her right. That means the Rangers must crush outlaws and Injuns, bring order out of chaos, and give decent folks a chance to work and live in peace."

"Yes, suh," agreed Jim Hatfield. "There's a passel of scalawags got to be run out of Texas, Cap'n."

His voice was surprisingly gentle for such a big man. For Hatfield stood well over six feet in his black half-boots with the red lone star trimming. His long legs were cased in pliant leather chaps, his wide shoulders bulged his blue shirt. At his narrow waist rode cartridge belts, with supple holsters that carried the blue-steel Colts, which he could handle with the speed of legerdemain.

Jet-black hair, with the crisp sheen of perfect health showed under the big Stetson with its chinstrap loose in its runner. Bronzed as a golden image, Hatfield was too sternly strong to be spoken of as handsome, but his latent, contained power was breath-catching. He was a splendid specimen of Texas manhood at its peak. The easy way he carried his great body belied his speed in a fight, for he could move with a devastating swiftness.

Now his gray-green eyes, as he heard the story of terror and death in the Panhandle, darkened with icy storm. His wide mouth set.

"And that's what this Kenneth Toll wires," finished McDowell. "Usually the sheriff calls us for help, but Toll asks for aid agin the sheriff! Looks like there's a carpet-bag setup in Colt City, so step careful and don't trust nobody till yuh find who yuh can trust. There's been killin's, and a bunch of sheet-wrapped riders pillagin' the ranches. I savvy this Meekham that Toll mentions. He rode for Jeb Stuart."

A little later, McDowell stood in the window, watching Jim Hatfield start for the Panhandle. The tall Ranger mounted a golden sorrel of magnificent lines. There was a carbine slung under one long leg as he settled in the saddle with the ease of a centaur. His poncho was rolled at the cantle, and his saddle-bags held iron rations. A belt of ammunition for the rifle hung from the horn, and he had spare cartridges for the twin Colts in his gear.

"Take it easy, Goldy," he murmured. "We got a long way to go and yuh got to warm up gradual."

He soothed the spirited gelding with his caressing voice.

"Two of a kind, horse and man," thought McDowell.

He always felt pride when he saw them, and Hatfield was his star, his best investigator. There were not many Rangers to

The white-clad man turned, his gun in his right hand, and Hatfield had to shoot quickly (CHAP. III)

keep order in the vast state, but Jim Hatfield would have stood out against a regiment of them.

The pace settled down, as Hatfield headed for the source of trouble. Riding hour after hour, camping during the dark for sleep, the Ranger made an incredibly rapid run to the rolling Panhandle country. Such officers were used to living off the land, on game which crossed the trail, on hardtack carried in the pockets.

He was still some hours east of Colt City, the point at which he was aiming on a sultry afternoon when the faint wind only seemed to increase the ovenlike heat, as he sighted rising dust. It came from riders on the dirt road he was traveling, and in such territory and times any stranger might be an enemy.

"Time for a breathin' spell anyways, Goldy," he murmured.

HE TURNED off the road, and dismounted, leading the sorrel up a slope overgrown with cottonwoods and mesquite. At the crest he could look westward and observe the winding, dry-rutted wagon trail. A number of horsemen were on it, but instead of keeping on and passing his point, they turned off into the brush and for a time were out of his sight, hidden by the low hills.

"Wonder if they seen my dust and are layin' for me?" he mused.

They could be highwaymen, or a gang of rustlers who were not willing to be seen, so were seeking to avoid him. The sorrel hadn't raised much dust, though, for the immediate stretch of road on which they had been, was overgrown with grass in the center and Goldy had stepped on this.

Hatfield dropped his reins, seized his carbine, and began to make a cautious way nearer, to check up. The wind, blowing in his face, rustled the dry seed pods of the mesquite. After easing along for a quarter of a mile he caught an unusual sound and paused again to listen, seeking to identify it.

"Somebody choppin' wood," he decided.

Creeping closer, he saw horses being held by a couple of guards who were smoking and talking together, in the hollow. Up the high rise were a dozen or so other men.

Obviously they had not noted his approach. They were on the hill and had begun to cut wood, an innocent enough occupation as a rule. He could hear the sound of voices but could not make out what was being said. Lying flat, he watched.

A squat, ugly man seemed to be in command. The setting sun glinted on bottles that some were consulting, even as they worked.

"Now what's the wire for?" the Ranger thought.

A long sapling had been cut, and the branches trimmed off. A length of wire was attached to one end of the pole, and the squat chief put a booted foot in the center of it while others carefully bent it until it looked like a bow. The other end of the wire was then fastened, and they had formed a large semi-circle of wood. This they proceeded to set up on top of a tree trunk from which they sawed the upper section.

In the blue sky, tinged with the golden red of the dropping sun, a faint column of smoke rose beyond. It might come from a home, a ranch or lonely settler's, decided the Ranger.

Work seemed to be finished for the time being, as the men on the next hill sat down or stretched out. They opened packages of food for their supper. A jug and flasks were passed around. They showed no disposition to move. The sun was apparently resting on the hazy horizon.

Having finished their repast, they smoked and drank on. The horse guards had been changed so the first two could eat, and the new fellows were watching the road through the gap. Hatfield could not proceed along the trail without being seen, nor could he ride over the flats to the north without the men on the rise sighting him. Unless he wished to go back and skirt far around, he must wait till dark. Besides, the general appearance of the gang held him where he was.

Then, in the last rays of day, the men trooped down the hill to their horses. In a matter-of-fact way they began to take white garments from the saddle-bags and bedeck themselves. Each had a sheet-like white cape which covered his body to the boots, and for the head a hood, with eye-holes, its twin peaks giving the impression of devil's horns sticking out. In this raiment they had, even in daylight, a sinister, startling aspect.

"I've shore hit the bull's-eye!" mused the Ranger. "It's a bunch of them White Gentlemen, as McDowell says they call themselves."

Dark fell over the vast Panhandle. The stars came out and there was a glow on the horizon warning of a rising moon. The Ranger, intrigued by what he had run upon, crept closer, around the hill's shoulder. He wished to hear what the men said, if possible. They were up to mischief, that was obvious, and this was his business, what he had come for.

He could hear the uneasy hoofs of the horses, the whisk of tails, then he could make out the words of a harsh voice giving orders.

"Yuh can light her up when you see our fire at Vernon's, Charlie. Then join us. We'll learn Vernon not to have any truck with that cussed Meekham. This'll throw a scare into other folks, too, and we got to spread out, the Boss says."

"All right, Bullhead," said one of the hooded figures.

Bullhead, the harsh-voiced chief, mounted,

and his men followed suit. All but Charlie, left to "light her up," trailed the leader from the cut, moving over the starlit plain. They were headed, decided the Ranger, in the direction of the smoke he had seen.

CHARLIE, after seeing his friends off, trudged back up the slope. Hatfield, making hardly a sound with his carefully placed feet, was within a few yards of the man when he reached the crest. The Ranger could catch the sibilant whistling as Charlie made music for himself. Against the sky he saw Charlie standing by the strange device his companions had erected, staring over the plain in the direction they had gone.

Determined to check them—Hatfield believed they must be aiming at the home which was the source of the smoke—he inched closer. The beacon would announce that the White Gentlemen were riding, and throw terror into the hearts of those who saw it flaming in the sky.

Charlie turned and Hatfield froze to the spot and position he was in. He thought he had been heard or seen but the white-clad man picked up something. At the beacon he sloshed liquid over the bowed tree on its posts. To the Ranger's flared nostrils came the distinctive odor of coal-oil.

Hatfield was almost upon Charlie when a loose stone clacked and the man turned, gun in his right hand.

"Who the—" he exploded.

It was necessary to fire, and quickly. The Ranger Colt sprang to his hand with a lightning-like whip, and Charlie fell, his own gun not yet up.

Drops of coal-oil dripped slowly from the beacon, as the Ranger saw that the man was dead. Quickly Hatfield stripped off the cloak-like white garment and the hood. It was not yet time to light the beacon, but he seized the can and poured more oil on the bent tree, then struck a match and touched it off.

The fire took hold, slowly for a time, but as the oil grew hot, it began to whoosh, and the flames licked up both arms of the bow. Soon it was a mass of yellowish light, the ends burning high, whipped by the night breeze.

"Mebbe it'll give the Vernons warnin'," he thought, as he glanced back once at the crumpled heap which was the White Gentleman.

In the cut he took the reins of Charlie's black, soothing the mustang with experienced hand. Slipping on the cape and hood, Hatfield mounted the black and rode after Bullhead and the gang.

Picking up speed, the Ranger galloped over the rolling plain. Looking over his hunched shoulder, he saw the beacon in the sky. The upward draughts caused the burning ends to lick high so the mass of flame had the rough aspect of a broken circle of fire. It was the symbol of the White Gentlemen, the murderous night riders of the Panhandle.

Before him loomed a lighted building, a small ranchhouse, and gunshots opened in the darkness. A circle of hooded men had spread about the place, and the Ranger, clad in the deceased Charlie's rig, boldly joined their ranks.

CHAPTER IV

Rendezvous

A MAN whipped his ghostly gray horse around to confront Hatfield's hooded figure. The light rays caught the gleaming eyes through the eye-holes. He swore angrily as he danced his gray up to the Ranger.

It worked as Hatfield had expected it would. The men in white took it for granted that he was their comrade who had been left on the hill to fire the beacon.

"Yuh fool, Charlie, yuh lit her too soon! Didn't give us a chance to fire the barn, and the beacon warned 'em. Are yuh full of red-eye?"

"Shucks, no, Bullhead," muttered the Ranger. He had recognized the leader's harsh voice, and he made his own as much like Charlie's as possible. At the same time, he had a Colt .45 in his hand, under the white cloak, just in case. "I thought it was time to let her go."

A heavy bullet, evidently from a Sharps buffalo gun, tore the air only inches from Bullhead and the Ranger. The leader of the White Gentlemen jumped in his leather seat, and with a startled oath spurred for the protection of the nearest outbuilding. The people in the house, having noted the flaming symbol in the sky, had leaped to arms.

The White Gentlemen were moving, riding back and forth so as to present less of a target to the marksmen crouched in the house. The lamps had been turned out, and the ranchhouse bulked black against the lighter sky as the moon rose over the Staked Plain. The buffalo gun now and then whooshed, its deep-throated explosion easy to identify, and its heavy slug, weighing eight to the pound, tearing the air with a low-pitched whine, seemed to mark each man for itself.

Bullhead's night raiders were none too courageous, when confronted with determined opposition. From what the leader had said, Hatfield had gathered that their system was to fire an outbuilding, then pick off the men who ran out in the light. Now, a fortunate hit by a defender of the ranchhouse had nicked one of the White Gentlemen and his screams and curses sounded off to Hatfield's left.

"Let's get, boys!" shouted Bullhead. "We can't rout 'em out now. Where's that Charlie jack? He ought to have his back kicked in!"

The men in white were drawing off, out of range, for they were being menaced by Vernon's bullets.

Hatfield, keeping silent, and holding his revolver ready in case anyone challenged him, tagged after them. But they were too busy with their own problems to notice him. Each man kept an eye on the ranchhouse as he retreated, thinking about his own hide, the way a piece of lead feels when it rips the flesh and vitals.

At the front rode Bullhead, as they made a lane which led into the rutted road to the south of Vernon's, and pushed on. Saddles creaked, and they strung out for a hundred yards, the pace slowing as danger was left behind.

Hunched over on Charlie's black mustang, the Ranger stayed with them for a time. A man turned, and called out loudly over his shoulder:

"Say, Charlie, yuh shore botched that one up! Yuh better lay off the likker when yuh got a job to do. Nicky got a slug right through the shoulder."

"Aw," growled the Ranger, "I done the best I could."

"Well yore best worsted us," punned the White Gentleman.

The waving land ocean took them up and down, with patches of woods and rocks dark on the plain to right or left, as the road wound roughly southwest. The moon was up and cast a silvery light, so it was easy to see to ride. On the right, now, appeared barbed wire, faintly shining strands strung on posts. The wind softly rustled the high grass which stretched northward into the distance.

Or was it grass, thought the Ranger. It was thick, its color different from the usual growth, and it was much higher.

"Some sort of crops," he decided. "And looks like a big field, too."

He edged the black nearer the fence, and leaned over, a long arm reaching down, across the upper strand. His hand snatched at a bunch of the bearded grassy stuff, and as soon as he had felt it, he knew what it was.

"Wheat!" he thought.

They trotted on for two miles. The fence was still there, with the wheat rustling behind it. South of the road, however, was the usual natural plain. At last they reached a corner, where the wire turned north. It bordered a road, and on the other side of this was more fencing to keep animals from the ripening wheat.

At the crossroads, Bullhead drew up, and the White Gentlemen had a smoke. Some consulted bottles they carried. There was a reddish glow in the sky, to the north.

THE Ranger stayed on the outskirts of the group of riders, ready to shoot a way out and ride for it if need be, but he was not suspected. The men gathered about Bullhead talking in low tones.

"Here they come, Bullhead!" one announced, after a time.

Down the road came a second bunch of White Gentlemen, in capes and hoods, to join Bullhead's crew.

"How'd you make out, Nip?" Bullhead asked the leader of the second gang.

"Not so good," growled the man called Nip. "I think we winged one of Meekham's sons but they were layin' for us, Bullhead. We got to blast that son out of his nest before we'll get anywhere, like I told Doc. Did yuh gun Vernon?"

Bullhead swore impatiently. "That fool Charlie touched off the beacon too soon and we didn't have much luck."

"Hey, Fuller!" called one of Bullhead's men. "What say we call it off for tonight and get back to town? I got a funny feelin' hard luck's ridin' with us."

"Yuh always was a jackass, Harry," came the acid answer. "Yore brayin' don't help none. But we're goin' back now, anyways."

"Fuller," thought Hatfield. "Nip Fuller. That's the sheriff's name, accordin' to McDowell's information!"

Fuller had about twice the number of men with him that Bullhead had. The two parties joined forces and, with Fuller and Bullhead talking together, jogging up front, they moved along the road.

A small, winding river came in from the west, and the road crossed it over a wooden bridge. The horses' hoofs drummed hollowly on the board planking. Thick woods and brush lined both banks of the stream.

They hurried on under the brilliant moon, which was nearing its full. But the horses were puffing when at last they sighted lights, having reached the summit of a mesquite-covered rise, and made for the settlement ahead. Just outside of it, Nip Fuller pulled up his horse. "Take 'em off, boys, and stow 'em," he ordered.

The White Gentlemen yanked off the hoods, then the capes. Folding them, they placed them in their saddle-bags.

It was time for the Ranger to desert them, for he could not ride among them without the disguise. Hearing Nip Fuller's command, he began edging toward a black patch of woods near at hand. Busy getting off their garb, the men did not notice, and he melted into the trees before removing the hood and cape. He waited until they resumed their journey and, at a safe distance, trailed them into Colt City.

They made for a large, two-storied saloon. It was lit by oil lamps, and the riders threw reins over the hitch-racks and, ducking under, went inside to the bar. The big room

was quickly filled with them, and Hatfield, leaving the black with dropped reins at the end of the main street, strolled through the shadows to the place. Its large sign proclaimed it to be the "Red Raven." Also, if you believed in signs, it was not only a saloon but a hotel, a boarding-house and gaming place.

A tall man wearing a sheriff's star he decided must be Nip Fuller. Another, ugly and squat, with a shaved, malformed head, likely was Bullhead. They were reporting to a big, stout fellow in black trousers and white shirt, a man with a fat nose over a firm mouth, and thin black hair plastered to a massive head.

Gazing through the open door at the crowded bar, where the White Gentlemen were tanking up, Hatfield noted that the big man had a defective eye, one that drooped in a permanent wink. His face was sour, now, as he listened to the sheriff and Bullhead. When they had finished—Hatfield could not hear what they said because of the babble of voices—Bullhead turned.

"Charlie!" he sang out. "Where's Charlie! Hey—Char-lie!"

The Ranger put a long leg over the low side rail outside, for two or three men up front had started for the door to hunt their missing friend. Evidently the large one wished to speak with the White Gentleman who had supposedly spoiled the work at Vernon's by lighting the beacon too soon.

Hatfield strolled down the passage, and quickly reached the waiting black mustang. He mounted, rode away from Colt City, and set his course for where he had left Goldy. The sorrel was waiting for him, and the hours had given him a needed rest.

Hatfield spent the rest of the night in the hills, and at dawn was up, had a cold snack, and saddled Goldy. He had picketed the black, but having finished with the mount, now released the mustang, leaving the extra saddle cached in the rocks. On Goldy, he set his course for the crossroads, and as he came to the great fields, he was astonished at the endless, waving wheat.

"Ripe—about ready to reap, and I never seen so much as they got here," he told the sorrel.

AS FAR as he could see, the wheat fields stretched north and west. It was a bright, sunny day, and the new light caught the golden tips, heavy with the grains.

The fencing had been done according to some skillful plan. It was of barbed wire, and just strong enough to discourage wandering cattle or buffalo, unless, of course, the animals were stampeding, in which case no fence could hold them. It was evidently a community job, too, for the only divisions were made where roads cut into the vast expanses. Many men had worked for long periods to string the fences protecting the crops.

"But it's shore worth it," he decided. "Seems to me wheat's jumped in price every time I see the paper."

He noted a few cattle grazing off to the south, and some smoke from a home tinged the clean blue of the sky as he turned into the road along which Sheriff Nip Fuller had come the night before, when the White Gentlemen had joined forces at the crossing of the roads.

Wheat was now on both sides of him, and the dirt road dipped up and down with the aspect of waves arrested in motion. The high grain edged the way, and keen as his eyes might be, they could not penetrate far into the wheat. Thoughtfully he transferred a Colt .45 from holster to his belt, under his shirt.

His gray-green eyes moved from right to left, and back again, and they grew weary of the monotony of brownish growth glistening in the sun. Finally he was aware that some sixth sense warned him, yet he kept going. He had a feeling of tenseness, that something was going to happen. Suddenly the golden sorrel, blending against the wheat, sniffed, and rippled his hide.

"Halt and reach!" a peremptory challenge rang out.

[*Turn page*]

CHAPTER V

The Reapers

HATFIELD could not see who had stopped him. But he knew that men were lying in the wheat to his left and to his right, for he noted faint movements of the grassy stuff.

"I'm reachin', mister," he replied. "Hold yore fire, whoever yuh are. I'm a friend."

"That's up to you to prove," said the forceful voice, a sardonic note coming into it. "Depends on whose friend yuh are, stranger."

Hatfield was fairly certain that he had been waylaid by the people he was looking for, the ranchers he had come to help.

"I was looking for Ken Toll's place," he said easily.

"What yuh want with Toll?"

"He's a pard of mine."

He kept his hands shoulder high to show his desire to please. There was a low-voiced conference in the wheat, and presently a young man in fringed buckskin, with alert eyes and a Colt held in one hand, emerged from the wheat a short distance behind Hatfield. He had been keeping low, so the grass would cover him, but he straightened up on the trail and approached the Ranger.

"Yuh're covered," the man who had spoken before said from his hiding-place.

"We'll have to take yore shootin' iron till we check up on yuh. This is war and I'm Cap'n Zeb Meekham." As Hatfield did not object, the voice went on, "We're Toll's pards, so if yuh're tellin' the truth and are his friend yuh got nothin' to worry over. My son Tim'll take good care of yore gun and hand it back soon as we fetch yuh to Toll."

"That's all right with me, Meekham," Hatfield said, and permitted Tim to extract the blue-steel Colt from his holster. He still had that spare under his shirt in case of need.

"Yuh can put down yore hands, now."

A big, light-haired man, with crisp hair slightly grayed at the temples emerged from the wheat. He had a barrel chest and strong hands. His pants were of butternut hue, and cocked on his handsome head was a Stetson with a jauntily curved brim. About his firm mouth were grim lines.

A couple of fellows in cowboy garb, carrying rifles, trailed him. Captain Meekham grinned up at the calm-faced Ranger.

"They didn't spare the materials when they made you, young feller! But yuh ride like a master cavalryman. I reckon I know one when I see him."

"Reckon yuh ought to, suh," said Hatfield. "Now, where's Toll?"

"He's up the line a piece. We're startin' to reap the grain but we got to watch out for a passel of polecats who're gunnin' for us. You go on and ride along slow, and I'll foller. My hoss is hid in the next dip . . . Tim, you and the boys stick here and guard."

Over the rise, Meekham picked up the reins of a saddled black and mounted, keeping always behind Hatfield as he escorted him. In the War he had learned military methods, and made no errors in guarding the Ranger, just as a precaution.

"Don't recall havin' seen yuh in these parts before," he remarked. He waited for an explanation but as Hatfield only shook his head, he went on, "Been a powerful lot of trouble around. It ain't Toll's affair, but he's helped us out and stuck with us. A fine young hombre if ever I saw one! The wheat's his idea. He practically had to force us to make us plant and fence. I s'pose yuh knowed him in the North, before he come to Texas?"

Hatfield cleared his throat but did not reply to Meekham's probing. He desired to survey the scene of operations and weigh both sides of the controversy before making his decisions and publicly announcing his identity. He already knew enough about the White Gentlemen and their methods to brand them as dangerous killers. As for Ken Toll, it was he who had wired the appeal to the Texas Rangers. Toll ought to make a dependable point of contact for a start.

Wheat, wheat, wheat! The golden grain flowed on and on, rustling softly in the Panhandle winds. Finally they reached a rise from which they saw horse-drawn reapers cutting wide swaths in the grain. Two alert guards, with rifles cradled in their arms were standing sentry while the others were at work.

The reaping machines had cutter bars and revolving rakes, with fingers that were skillfully apt. A man drove the horses, guiding them as they drew the machines.

"There's Toll over there, bossin' the job," said Meekham, and waved to his friends.

"Oh, Ken!" he sang out in a stentorian voice. "Here's a pard to see yuh."

A slender young man in blue levis and a wide-brimmed straw hat turned to them. His quick blue eyes sought Hatfield's but looked entirely devoid of recognition, and Cap Meekham frowned. He grew quickly alert, watching the Ranger closely.

"Thought yuh said yuh was a friend of Toll's!" he growled.

"I shore am," drawled the tall officer. "Toll, if yuh'll give me a minute to speak with yuh private-like, I'll soon convince yuh I'm yore friend."

KEN TOLL nodded. He swept off his straw hat and wiped his bronzed face with a bandanna. His dark hair was damp with sweat.

Cap Meekham's suspicions of the stranger had sparked again to flame, since Toll had not recognized him. He never took his eye off Hatfield and his gun was at the ready, while Toll and Hatfield moved off a short distance where they might talk without being overheard.

"Now what is it, sir?" asked Toll politely. "I'm mighty busy with the reaping, as you can see. I have to teach the others and supervise it all. Who are you?"

"My handle is Jim Hatfield, Toll." The Ranger dismounted and stood by the sorrel as he faced Toll. Tall as the wheat expert was he had to look up to see into the serene gray-green eyes. "McDowell sent me from Austin, soon as he got yore wire askin' for help." Cupped in his strong, slim hand was the silver star on silver circle, emblem of the Texas Rangers, so that only Toll could see it. "Yuh wanted the Rangers. I'm here."

Toll's eyes brightened and he thrust out his hand to shake.

"It's good to see you, Hatfield. These folks are in a desperate plight. They're the salt of the earth—I guarantee that. All they want is to be let alone so they can work and make a living. I'm from the North but I understand that, and have done what little I could to help. A lot of them are Confederate veterans, disfranchised. They have no control over their local government since they can't vote. Carpet-baggers who invaded these parts have been running the political set-up for years, backed by the threat of Government troops."

"Now the South is reconstructin'," Hatfield said. "The troops have been pulled out."

Toll nodded. "That's it. And the gangs who have filled all the offices and stolen the taxes don't want to give up what they hold. In Colt City, not far from here, is a powerful organization run by a man named Sayers. He has picked the county sheriff, the commissioners, and other officials as he pleased. He has spread his net far and wide, is constantly expanding his hold.

"Now he is shrewd enough to realize his days are numbered. Once Meekham and the real settlers of this country regain the ballot they'll drive Sayers and his kind out of Texas. Lately, it's grown much worse. Before, they were content to steal the ranchers' best cattle, and levy a tax now and again. But knowing what the next election means, Sayers, I'm convinced, intends to kill Meekham and as many of our leaders as he can, to weaken us so that he may hold on to his political control."

"And these here White Gentlemen?" inquired the Ranger softly.

Toll shuddered with revulsion at the name of the night riders. He licked his lips, nodding.

"They ride at night, and usually there is a flaming broken circle seen in the sky. We haven't identified them, but I'm sure they're Sayers' men, hidden under their sheet-like hoods and capes. The White Gentlemen have shot down friends of Meekham's and mine, burned some buildings. We've been forced to spend a great deal of time on guard, fighting them off. Sayers is using them as a weapon of terror, to frighten us into surrender, to destroy us."

"How have yuh managed to hold 'em off?"

"Only by eternal vigilance," replied Toll earnestly. "Some of our friends have actually fled their ranches and homes and come to stay at Meekham's. We keep on guard day and night, and the strain is wearing us down. At any time a bullet may strike one of us dead—and the White Gentlemen are growing stronger. I believe Sayers and his men are enlistin' more riders all the time.

"Sheriff Fuller, one of Sayers' figureheads, has warrants sworn out for Meekham and several of our leaders. At first they let me alone, but I understand that now I'm to be arrested. And if we were foolish enough to submit to arrest, we'd be disarmed and killed. Of that I'm certain."

Toll had a clear way of expressing himself and driving home his points. Hatfield could see that the position of the Texans was desperate, as the young man said. Doc Sayers had full control of all legal machinery. Witnesses might be bought, owned by the enemy, so that Sayers could destroy the ranchers as he pleased, once he held them in his hands.

"This here wheat yuh've raised is interestin', Toll," said the Ranger. "It's worth plenty, ain't it?"

"It is. That's what's so ironical about the situation, Ranger. For the first time since the end of the war it seemed Meekham and his friends might pull out of the financial hole they've been in. Wheat's high in price and going up. I'm a wheat man, you see, and it was due to my advice that they tried it. We're cuttin' now, and in this warm, dry climate it dries quickly. Then the stacks will be fed into the threshers and the grain bagged for shipment by railroad."

"Provided yuh can get to the railroad through Sayers' gang," suggested Hatfield.

"That's it. Sayers owns the law and we have no one to turn to. I thought of the Rangers, and as a last resort had a man ride through one night to send that telegram to Austin."

"How much wheat yuh figger on shippin'?"

TOLL HAD it all down. Hatfield whistled, and took in the total figures and multiplied the number of bushels by the market price. Toll was young but he had a smart head on him, thought the Ranger.

They went back to Meekham, who had waited, on the alert, throughout their talk.

"This is Jim Hatfield, Cap," said Toll. "You

can trust him the way you do me—or yourself."

Zeb Meekham blinked. "Didn't take yuh long to get acquainted," he remarked, scratching his head. "But what Toll says goes with us. Here, mister."

He handed back the blue-steel Colt, and for a moment looked surprised when Hatfield drew forth the hidden mate to it to slide into the holsters. Then he grinned.

"So yuh had a hidden fang!"

They all liked the tall Hatfield, now that Toll had vouched for him and they could trust the stranger. He stayed with them, assisting them in the work, and around noon they knocked off toil to eat the lunch brought from the ranchhouse. They shared with the Ranger, and he picked up all the information he needed concerning them and their problems.

Quitting at five o'clock, Hatfield rode with Meekham and Toll, and their aides and friends, to the ranchhouse, a short run from where they had begun the reaping.

CHAPTER VI

A Clever Scheme

JIM HATFIELD met more of the ranchers at Meekham's, Addisons, Lees, and Jacksons, and young Dan Crane, who had been wounded one day after seeing his father killed in cold blood by Bullhead Greggs. And the Ranger was introduced to pretty June Meekham the girl Toll wanted to make his wife. With her hair that was the color of spun sunlight, her blooming cheeks, and her smile that was a delight, June was a girl to fascinate any man.

Even as her soft hand touched the Ranger's as she greeted Hatfield he sensed the strength of the bond uniting Ken Toll with the former Rebels. And a feeling tinged with envy stabbed at his heart, though his rugged, strong face did not show his emotions.

He had yearned for such a girl as June, as his own. All women, he thought, were wonderful. They were the real home-makers, somehow managing to bring civilization even to the Frontier. Life centered about them, for while a man might be entirely content with his horse and saddle and a blanket to lie in wherever the ground invited, a woman organized that orderly existence which meant progress.

But such was not for the Ranger. His perilous work kept him constantly roving, usually in the most dangerous of places. At any moment his life might be snapped off by a skulking assassin's bullet, a lucky shot from one of the State's enemies. It would hardly be fair to ask a girl to share a life like that. It was worse than a soldier going to battle, for the war the Rangers waged against evil was never ended.

Meekham's ranch, Hatfield saw at once, bustled with activity. Men were seeing to the animals, watering and feeding them, rubbing them down after the day's work. From the kitchen came the tantalizing odors of frying beef and coffee about ready to pour, and with it the more delicate smell sent forth by baking biscuits and pies. Mrs. Meekham, Becky, June, and several women neighbors who had come with their men to the safety of the larger place, had been busy throughout the day with the ceaseless household work of cleaning, mending, cooking, all designed to please sons and husbands, sweethearts and fathers.

Hatfield fitted in perfectly. He understood these people. They liked him, as he did them, and they were drawn to him by the magnetism of his mental and physical powers, his personality and appearance.

"Come and eat!"

The announcement did not cause a stampede exactly, but it was as close to it as civilized human beings might come. Long tables were laden in the roomy kitchen annex, with steaming plates of food inviting the men whose appetites were keen from long hours of labor out-of-doors.

Hatfield rivaled them all in capacity. The hot meal was a welcome change from the iron rations the Ranger consumed when on the march. Besides, it was considered impolite for a guest not to eat until he was about to burst, and Hatfield gave no excuse for anyone to say he did not appreciate the cooking.

"Look, now, Tim," said Zeb Meekham, winking as his younger son dug in voraciously, "you're eatin' the plate!"

That was a sample of the good-natured banter and there was much laughter. The day's events, small in themselves, were described and children made much of. There were several who had been brought by their parents to Meekham's, for safety.

After the meal, the lamp was lit in the big main room. The summer night was warm, the doors and windows wide open. Someone brought out an accordion, and another a fiddle. The strains of music burst forth and the people listened, feet tapping. June and Toll and other young couples went on the roomy veranda, to dance.

The musicians broke into a song everybody knew.

> Buffalo gals, are yuh comin' out tonight,
> Comin' out tonight?
> Buffalo gals, are yuh comin' out tonight
> And dance by the light of the moon!

Cap Meekham roared the song with the music, beating time with a waving arm and heavy foot.

Other favorites followed—"Old Zip Coon," and "Turkey in the Straw." The spirited Dixie, which had been the battle hymn of the South, made them pause.

"June," called Meekham, "come on, sing for us."

June came in, smiling, with Toll at her heels. The company quieted, to listen to her clear voice accompanied by the violin, as she sang:

Why so pale and wan, fond lover?
Prithee, why so pale?
Will, when looking well can't move her,
Looking ill prevail?
Prithee, why so pale?

She sang the verses of the old song, and women sighed, touched by its emotional appeal. Their men held their hands. Love was ever a favored topic of conversation and music among such people.

HATFIELD enjoyed the homely entertainment. It was a diversion for him, and he realized they must live, must work and eat, care for their loved ones, sleep, in spite of other considerations. He glanced from an open window. Against the moonlit sky loomed a dark figure, one of Meekham's riders watching, always watching.

The threat of death and destruction was ever upon these folks, and it was the Ranger's business to remove it. Even as he participated in the fun, Hatfield was making his plans.

The evening's entertainment was over at an early hour, and Jim Hatfield turned in for a good night's sleep in a bunk. He was up at break of day, though, had a quick breakfast, and headed at once for the corral where he caught up Goldy.

Jim Hatfield finished saddling the golden sorrel, and added the finishing touch, a pat and caressing word for his beautiful Goldy. He turned for a last word with Ken Toll, who had come to say good-by in the first rays of the new dawn.

"Keep Meekham and his friends in line for me, Toll," he instructed. "And don't misjudge me. If yuh see me ridin' with Sheriff Fuller, Greggs and Doc Sayers, don't jump to the conclusion I've crossed yuh, savvy? I know you folks, and I'm with yuh. But in order to save yore bacon I must work close to Sayers and find out his strength and his plans. The enemy has secrets I must uncover."

Ken Toll nodded. "You're all right with me, Ranger. I'd trust you to the end of the line."

"Meekham's a good man and a strong one," Hatfield went on, "but he's quick on the draw. You have a good effect on him, Toll. He needs some calmin' down."

Toll motioned toward a long-legged, strong-looking chestnut, unsaddled, which he had brought at Hatfield's request.

"This is one of my horses," he said. "You can keep him as long as you like."

"Thanks. He'll do. I'll turn him loose when I'm through with him, and I reckon he'll run home to the range here where yuh can pick him up."

"You really mean to go to Colt City?"

Toll was troubled. He had quickly come under the Ranger's influence, and liked the big officer, besides looking on him as a last hope for his friends.

"Shore am," Hatfield said, smiling. "I got a scheme that may work out so's I'll get in touch with Sayers pronto. I can't waste too much time."

"They're a nasty lot, that gang, Ranger." Toll shook his head. "How do you expect them to trust you, a stranger? And if they're the least bit suspicious, they'll kill you without a qualm."

Hatfield nodded. "I savvy that. I had a taste of their ways when I rode with the White Gentlemen. I ain't expectin' to be kickin' the daisies, Toll, but if anything should happen to me, there's one thing you must do—notify McDowell in Austin, and the Rangers will keep comin'."

He shook hands with Toll, and threw a long leg over the saddle. His six-guns were oiled, filled, and ready to talk. His carbine was in its sling, and he was rested, refreshed after the hours spent at the ranch, as was Goldy. He held the chestnut by a lead-rope and swung off with a final wave as Toll watched him, standing there in the corral.

Toll's question about how he expected to impress Sayers and such a close organization as the White Gentlemen, he had turned aside. But it had occurred to him previously, and he had thought it all over. The scheme that he had concocted might work, might bring him to the notice of the leaders.

The spare horse was to carry the body of Charlie, the deceased White Gentleman, back to Colt City. It was the Ranger's idea that, arriving at dark, he would turn loose Toll's horse, with the brand on it, and cover the last stretch with the dead man across Goldy. With such an introduction, he hoped to go on from there, and had his story ready. He had been told Sayers was recruiting gunmen.

He passed the spot where the reapers waited for the new day's work to begin, and made for the back road, eyes sweeping this way and that. Reaching the out-trail, he moved back toward where the broken circle had been burning on the hilltop, and where he had left Sayers' man.

The sun was golden and warm, the heat was increasing, and the air dry and sweet with summer's breath. Apparently the road was deserted for he saw no dust, nothing to give him any cause of alarm, as he turned Goldy into the cut and pulled up where the White Gentlemen had left their horses.

DISMOUNTING, he dropped reins, and fastened the chestnut's lead-rope to a tree trunk.

Black shapes high in the blue were circling in great sweeps overhead—buzzards. He glanced at them, then looked down the hillside, broken by jutting red rocks and patches of brush. On the east of the cut lay the cover he had used when he had crept up on the White Gentlemen under Bullhead Greggs.

But he had a job to do, and hurried to it. In the brilliant daylight, the body lay crumpled as the man had gone down under the Ranger gun. The bearded face was distorted, the teeth clenched. Smudges of dirt and a tear showed in the dark clothing. Near at hand was a charred tree stump, with charcoal lengths and the piece of wire which had been the half circle, burnt by the Ranger. The oil-can lay empty on its side, its spout dug a little way into the sandy earth.

The Ranger wrapped a blanket he had brought around the remains, and started down the slope. It was an unpleasant task, but if he could gain entry into the gang by use of the body, he would not hesitate because it was distasteful.

Charlie was heavy. The weight was a dead one, and Hatfield kept his face averted. The journey to the horses seemed long, and he was glad when he reached them, and was about to sling the corpse over the chestnut's back. But the horse shied, and Hatfield soothed him, following as Toll's animal sidled away.

"So you downed him! Stand quiet or I'll drill yuh!"

The voice came from behind Hatfield. Whoever had spoken had gained the same position in which the Ranger had been when he had spied on the White Gentleman. The man was concealed by the hill's shoulder where some large boulders had broken off and fallen from the bluff forming one side of the cut.

Freezing where he stood, his back exposed to a leveled gun, Hatfield tried to see his foe from the corner of his eyes but the person was well hidden. The Ranger was in an embarrassing position, with his arms full of Charlie. Before he could try to draw and whirl, he must drop the body. That would give his opponent an unbeatable advantage.

"What yuh want me to do, mister?" he called, as the silence grew unbearable.

"Don't be in a hurry. I'm sort of surprised myself. I seen the buzzards, when I woke up a while back, and strolled over to investigate. What'd yuh kill him for?"

"Who says I killed him?" countered the Ranger.

It was a good sign, the man being willing to talk. It gave Hatfield time, and he sought for a way to identify the concealed fellow, who seemed to be a sardonic humorist.

"Turn around, slow-like," the hidden man said. "I want to see yore handsome face and whoever it is yuh got there."

CHAPTER VII

Secret Weapon

NOW, as Hatfield complied, he could glimpse a pair of pale but sharp eyes under a thatch of sandy hair which much resembled a bird's nest. In the center was a bald patch a couple of inches in diameter—the man had removed his Stetson for his spying operations. And the sharp eyes not only looked at Hatfield but along the sights of a Winchester rifle laid for steady aim on the flat rock surface and pointed straight at the Ranger's center.

"Huh—yuh're bigger'n yuh look," observed the master of the situation in a bright tone. "Who's that yuh got?"

"His name's Charlie," replied Hatfield gruffly.

The sight of the dead man, the name, did not apparently stir any recognition. Hatfield deduced that at least his captor wasn't one of the White Gentlemen.

"Yuh say yuh didn't shoot him? How'd yuh savvy he was there?"

Hatfield quickly seized his advantage.

"Same way you did, mister. I seen the buzzards loopin' above."

"Well-taken, well-taken, my boy. Now let's see."

"My arms are gettin' tired, holdin' this up."

"Don't be impatient, son. When yuh get to be my age and still have yore scalp on tight—figgeratively speakin', that is—yuh'll savvy it was because yuh never went off half-cocked. If yuh don't—well, that'll be because yuh're dead and unable to figger."

Hatfield waited. Then the bald-headed man asked:

"How far's Colt City, son?"

So he was a stranger—and, Sayers was recruiting.

Perhaps this man was a specimen of gunny coming in for the kill.

"Not half a day's ride, mister," the Ranger answered. "I'm on my way there—or was, till yuh asked me for tea."

The jest brought a faint chuckle, and Hatfield drawled on:

"Doc Sayers won't thank yuh for this, whoever yuh are."

"Tch, tch!" The man clucked in mock regret. "So yuh ride for Sayers! Then we must be friends. Shucks! And I thought I'd found the perfect hoss at last. I'll admit now I was more interested in the hoss than in you—I mean that golden geldin'. Want to sell him?"

"I ain't honin' to. Him and me was raised in the same stable. When we was colts we swore we'd stick together, and whichever got tired first would tote the other. So far, I've always been first to wear out."

Hatfield had hit the vein which amused the man in the rocks. Sayers' name had cinched it.

"Tell yuh what I'll do," the fellow suggested. "I'm on my way to see Doc Sayers. S'pose we ride together to Colt City? On the way we can chew the fat. I hate to be alone."

"Right," said Hatfield. "My handle's Hayes, and I ride for Sayers. I'm one of his lieutenants, savvy? This feller was our man, drygulched by some dirty Rebs we're fightin' in these parts."

"It all fits in with my information, Hayes," said the man with the fringe of sandy hair. "Yuh're lookin' at a good friend. My name's Montmorency O'Rourke, but the boys insist on callin' me Baldy—I don't know why." He grinned as he rose up, letting down the rifle muzzle and taking the weapon off cock.

"Baldy" put on his Stetson. He was a broad man, with heavy hips and pudgy hands that were decorated with two large signet rings. His flesh was pink, his nose big, but ran straight to the forehead without any bridge dip. His eyes were frosty, and about his gash of a mouth were many tiny lines. He had a crisp way of speaking.

He wore corduroy trousers, well-fitted half-boots, a brown shirt and a pearl-handled six-shooter at his stout, belt-circled waist. He watched as Hatfield dumped the body of the White Gentleman over the chestnut, and fastened it in place with rope.

"S'pose I pick up my hoss, son," he said, "then we'll ride together. See yuh in a jiffy."

He was some years older than Hatfield, obviously crafty and experienced, and versed in the lore of the danger trails. Though he had evidently accepted the tall young fellow as a friend, he never turned his back to the Ranger as he melted around the bluff to fetch his mustang.

The Ranger might have run for it then, but that wasn't his way. He resented Baldy's breezy familiarity, the close call he had had with the man. Baldy had thrown a wrench into his plans. Now he was committed as a lieutenant of Sayers, the instant they hit Colt City Baldy would discover he was not even known among the gang. Only the fact that Baldy was a stranger had saved Hatfield from a death slug in the back.

HE WAITED where the cut joined the road. Baldy came around the turn on a large bluish-black stallion with large, bared teeth, fighting the bit. He was a splendid horseman, and his vigilance had not relaxed. It was second nature to him. He never turned his back to his new trail companion, remaining on the left of Goldy as Hatfield rode, leading the laden chestnut.

His talk was lively, his voice metallic, but effective.

"Names are funny sometimes, ain't they?" he remarked. "Yores is Hayes. S'pose they call you Seedy, huh?" He laughed, and went on, "Hear the one about the feller name of Hogg? Made him mad because he was always bein' teased. He had three daughters and he named 'em Ima, Ura and Sheza!"

Hatfield smiled, as Baldy slapped his leg and roared.

For a mile, Baldy told jokes, chestnuts that had been going the rounds since the Revolution, and others of newer make, many of them ribald. But all the while he never gave Hatfield the slightest opportunity to gain an advantage. The Ranger thought it was just natural shrewd caution, for Baldy seemed to be convinced that he was one of the Colt City gang.

His silence, speaking only when directly questioned, began to irk Baldy.

"Yuh're a quiet young cuss, ain't yuh?" he complained. "When I was yore age I was a hellion on wheels. Thought of nothin' but gals and likker. Now I think of—nothin' but likker and gals!"

His bright eyes sought the long sweep of the Ranger's jaw, pulled up by the taut chin strap of his hat. He tried another tack, seeking to impress his comrade. He patted his shirt pocket, and paper rattled there.

"Sayers'll be mighty glad to see me, Hayes. I got word for him from Mayor Jelliffe."

"Oh— you're from Jelliffe!" exclaimed Hatfield. "Shore, the Boss'll be happy yuh come! We been expectin' yuh."

"Yuh have? How do yuh think I ride—on wings? I started the day yore message reached Jelliffe—he's my chief. I made real fast time, too."

In the long run, Baldy was a crass, unpleasant character. The breezy jests were a bore, and covered a calculating, cruel nature that was entirely self-centered. He was a dangerous opponent.

"Yuh savvy Doc?" asked the Ranger softly.

"Who—me? Nope. Never met him, though I've heard of him from Jelliffe. The way things are goin', with these here Rebs a-kickin' up their traitorous heels, us folks got to stick together. Agreed?"

"Agreed. But there's a tough bunch of nuts in these parts."

"Sayers and our boys'll crack 'em wide open!"

Baldy spat venomously, and his bright eyes were not so pleasant now. His hard jaw was set, rimmed with dark beard stubble, the jowls coated with dirt, black specks in the skin folds.

It would be a golden opportunity if Hat-

field could get the better of Baldy. The Ranger saw that clearly. Sayers was expecting a messenger from Jelliffe, evidently some colleague. Baldy was it. But whoever brought Jelliffe's letter, which was in Baldy's pocket, would be the favored one for a time —until the "boys," bringing the assistance requested by Sayers, should arrive. Baldy had ruined Hatfield's scheme of approach, but he presented a better one.

Yet from habit, Baldy was never off guard.

"What's all this?" inquired Baldy, as they rode past the fenced field. "Wheat, ain't it?"

"Yeah, wheat." The Ranger nodded.

Baldy studied the grain, softly bowing in the warm summer wind.

"Awful lot of it. Who growed it?"

"The Rebs. It's worth money these days."

"Huh. Mebbe it is."

Suddenly Hatfield jerked Goldy's reins.

"Look out, Baldy! There's the Rebs, hidin' in the wheat just ahead!"

He drew, firing into the wheat a short distance up the road, and the ruse sent Baldy veering off to the left, his eyes widening, hunting the announced foes. For the first time since their journey together began, Baldy was not ready for Hatfield as the Ranger whirled on him.

"I knew he was fast!" thought the Ranger.

Baldy, at the instant of alarm, had reacted with terrific speed, his Colt jumping into his blurred hand. Expert legs, even as he pulled his gun, sent the black hopping sideward, so that Baldy was in perfect position to shoot at the supposed Rebels in the wheat.

THEN his practised eyes told him there were no enemies there. There was no return fire, nothing save the innocent wheat, and he was only about a second behind Hatfield, despite the Ranger's trick. His brain swiftly figured it all out. For some good reason the tall man had duped him, and his teeth were bared as he sought to regain the advantage he had held.

"Ura hog, Baldy," drawled the Ranger. "Drop it and reach!"

"Yuh dirty pup!" gritted Baldy. "I should've killed yuh when I had the chance! Had a feelin' yuh was—"

He was talking, hoping it would hold his foe's hand for the trifle of time he must have to turn his gun. So there was only one thing to do, since Baldy refused to give up. The Ranger took the step, with trained skill and speed, since he had given the outlaw his chance to surrender.

The long thumb lifted from the hammer of the blue-steel Colt, and the firing-pin drove home. The .45 caliber slug tore into Baldy's cheek under his left eye. He jerked in his saddle but his legs, still locked by the brain's command, held for moments. The bullet from his pearl-handled six-shooter kicked dirt in the road, for he hadn't brought it up quite high enough to pin the tall man on the sorrel.

Hatfield pushed Goldy at the black, which reared as the explosions raced away to lose themselves in the vastness of space. Baldy's body sagged, then his legs relaxed. The sudden jerks of his mustang caused him to topple, and he fell on his face in the trail, while the black trotted down the road, slowed, then dropped his head to graze at wheat fronds sticking over the barbed wire fence.

Hatfield hit the dirt and rolled Baldy over on his back. He would have taken the outlaw prisoner and held him at Meekham's had Baldy submitted, but there were undoubtedly good reasons why Baldy had refused.

There was—for among the papers stuffed in his shirt pocket, a "Wanted" circular with Baldy's portrait the main illustration, and offering $500.00 reward, dead or alive, should he be delivered to a certain Louisiana city, where he had killed a man.

It was the letter the Ranger was hunting, however, which most intrigued him. He found it in a white envelope, folded once. It was addressed to "Dr. Rudolph Sayers, Cty Com., Colt City, Tex.," and read:

Dear Doc:

Yrs rec'd. Have obtained what you want from the Fort and have packed for shipment. Am in same boat here, like you, so gladly accept your offer of aid after we clean up your bailiwick. Rebels must be destroyed or they will finish us all off. Agree we must stick together to hold Texas. Like your idea of political chain throughout entire state. Am sending thirty men and what you want immediately. Yrs,

JELLIFFE, Mayor.

"Huh, this Sayers is gettin' bigger and bigger," mused the Ranger, as he finished the note, carefully returning it to its envelope and slipping it into his own breast pocket. "He's figgerin' on formin' his political clubs all through the state so's the carpetbaggers can keep the people down."

The White Gentlemen, he was sure, would be part of the machinery.

"Now I wonder what this secret weapon is that Jelliffe's shippin' over?" he thought anxiously.

It might be explosives!

CHAPTER VIII

Contact

MOUNTING, after hiding Baldy in the wheat, Hatfield caught the black after a short chase. He unsaddled the animal, then went through Baldy's saddle-bags, but found only spare ammunition, food and personal belongings. He concealed the gear

and turned the black loose.

Checking his appearance and weapons, he set the sorrel's head toward Colt City, leading the chestnut with Charlie roped on the mustang's back.

It was not yet dark when he sighted Colt City in the reddening late afternoon light, nestling in its hollow along the brown-watered river. He dismounted, transferred Charlie to the sorrel's back, and turned Toll's mustang loose. Then he got back in his saddle and rode the last half mile to town.

He proceeded straight up Main Street, to the plaza, in the middle of the dusty road, and while he kept his eyes straight ahead, he knew he was making an impression. Sayers' men were usually on the watch, just in case Meekham and his Rebs should try to attack them in their lair.

From the shaded awnings which projected over the board walks, from open windows, and from the doorways along the way, they came to see the man on the golden sorrel with a dead body behind him. He was trying to create a sensation and knew he had succeeded when Sheriff Nip Fuller's tall figure ducked under the hitch-rack to confront him as he pulled his reins, turning in to the Red Raven.

"Say, you! Where'd yuh get that!"

Hatfield, his jaw set and his eyes steady, regarded the official. Sallow-hided, bleary-eyed, weak-chinned, Fuller was a perfect example of a venal, hand-picked lawman. The badge on his stained vest was a farce, for he was as much an outlaw as any of the White Gentlemen.

"So you're Sheriff Nip Fuller," he drawled.

"Yeah. . . . Hey—that's Charlie!"

Men were crowding around now, as Fuller went close to look over the missing aide. The ugly Bullhead Greggs was among the crew, and Hatfield, observing them all at close range, recognized some others of the White Gentlemen he had seen when he had come upon them during his trip in. They were chiefly toughs, heavily armed, hard of eye.

Fuller scowled up at him as he sat with one long leg cocked at the saddle-horn, and lit a quirly he had rolled.

"I asked yuh where yuh found Charlie!" repeated the sheriff harshly. "He was a friend of ours, savvy?"

"Kick his teeth out and mebbe he'll talk easier," suggested Bullhead Greggs.

Greggs' little eyes were malicious, his lips writhed in a snarl as he watched the rugged Ranger. His arms were akimbo, the lumpy hands close to his twin Colts. Evil of temper, ready to kill at the drop of a hat, Greggs insolently grimaced as the Ranger's cool gaze pinned his.

In the manner of a lordly bandit who operated under the protection of a political machine's power, Hatfield drawled:

"Son, I need them teeth to chew up my skunk meat. I dote on it." His meaning glance left no question but that he was referring to Bullhead Greggs.

"Why, you—" snarled Greggs.

Fuller interfered. "Pipe down, Bullhead . . . Now, you, where'd yuh find Charlie?"

"I'd have told yuh, Sheriff," Hatfield said, "if there wasn't so many fools hornin' in. I was headin' for Colt City on important business from Mayor Jelliffe to Commissioner Doc Sayers, when I see some boots stickin' out of a wheat field a few miles back. This hombre, yore pard, was in 'em. I loaded him and fetched him in. Is that a crime?"

"No, it ain't. By hook, them Rebs dry-gulched him somehow! Mighty funny. I reckon, Bullhead, he must've got scared when he made that mistake at the beacon and decided to sashay. The Rebs seen him and downed him."

"Sounds logical," agreed Greggs. His manner had softened somewhat as he looked up at Hatfield. "Yuh say Mayor Jelliffe sent yuh?" he inquired.

"That's right. I got a letter for Sayers."

"I'll take it," said Fuller instantly. "We been lookin' for yuh. What's yore handle?"

"Blackjack Kane. That's good enough, ain't it?"

"Good enough. But let's have the letter. I'll see Sayers gets it."

"Sorry. My boss said I was to hand it direct to Sayers."

THEIR manner had changed, and they now treated the tall rider with the deference due an important ambassador. Even Bullhead Greggs eased up.

"George," Sheriff Fuller ordered one of the men, "take a couple of the boys, get a barrow and plant pore Charlie in Boot Hill. You Kane, come along. I'll take yuh to Doc."

Hatfield dismounted, dropping his reins over the hitch-rack in front of the Red Raven. He ducked under, trailing the lanky sheriff, and inside. The bar was deserted, as everybody had trooped out to see the sights. The sun was dropping over the escarpment of the Staked Plain, far to the west. The shadows were lengthening, and a Mexican youth was busy with a taper, lighting the gilt oil-lamps hanging from their chains.

There was sawdust on the floor, and some tables about. Along the right wall ran the bar. The Red Raven was a roomy place, with wings, additions, and a second story reached by a flight of steep steps at the rear. There were other doors in back, too.

"Bud, set 'em up on the house for this gent," ordered Fuller of the barkeeper. "Wait a jiffy, Blackjack, and I'll tell Doc yuh're here. Them cussed Rebels! They downed pore Charlie and they've got it comin' to 'em what they're goin' to get! They're the scum of the earth, so many animals we got to get

rid of. Why, a pack of Injuns is better'n them. Huh!"

"We're in the same fix over our way, Sheriff," ventured the Ranger. "Now they got the vote back and the soldiers are gone, they're raisin' Hades. But we'll fix their clocks."

"That's the spirit! I'll tell Doc yuh're wantin' to see him."

Fuller had thrown a drink into himself. Now his scissorslike legs took him rapidly to the back of the bar, and through a door. Soon he reappeared, beckoning to Hatfield, who finished off his liquor and joined the lanky officer. Fuller led him through a hall, and to a large room fitted with chairs, a desk, and a carpet. It was Sayers' office, and a bedroom and kitchen opened to the rear.

The man in the swivel chair, wearing black clothing and a white shirt, and leaning comfortably back watching him as he followed the sheriff into the office, was the large, stout fellow the Ranger had glimpsed the night he had trailed the White Gentlemen into town. Hatfield remembered the fat nose, the firm lips, the thin black hair pomaded to a massive head. The man's pudgy hands were folded on his protruding paunch, and as he regarded the Ranger one eye fluttered, for the lid was defective.

But the gray gaze was calculating, shrewd. Sayers, thought the Ranger, was no fool. His brain might be evil but he had one. It took a strong mind, a quick one, to run such a bunch as the White Gentlemen, and wield such political power.

"Good evenin'," said Sayers softly. "Yuh have a message for me?"

"If yuh're Doc Sayers."

"That's me."

"Yuh're shore of it?"

Sayers frowned for a moment, then relaxed. He pointed to the desk.

"See for yoreself," he said. "My mail, and other documents."

"Bueno." Hatfield nodded. "Jelliffe told me to be careful, so don't hold it agin me."

"Not at all. I admire yore caution."

Hatfield took out the folded note, and handed it to Sayers, who lost no time in ripping it open and reading it.

The defective eye winked faster, but Sayers was plainly pleased, as he nodded. The keen gray eyes looked again at Hatfield.

"No doubt yuh're familiar with the contents?"

"No doubt."

"I thought yuh might be, Kane. Well, I'm glad. These Rebs are the scum of the earth. They deserve no consideration. It's them or us, and that's a fact. They're no better'n so many ferocious beasts who must be destroyed to make Texas safe for decent folks." Those had been Fuller's words. No doubt the sheriff obtained his ideas from his chief, Doc Sayers, parroting the leader.

"We're in the same soup, Doc, over there," Hatfield said. "Jelliffe puts a lot of stock in me. I was his bodyguard for six months, savvy? It's my line. I enjoy fightin'."

Hatfield sought the right mixture of conceit and boasting as he sought to impress himself on Sayers.

Sayers nodded. "Yuh look like a good man and a strong one. We're glad to have yuh with us. Will yuh stick here till the rest come, or are yuh ridin' home?"

"Jelliffe said for me to wait. I'm to serve yuh if there's anything yuh want done."

"Thanks. I'll let yuh know. In the meantime, make yoreself at home. The boys'll see to it yuh enjoy the town. Yuh can bed down with 'em. Drinks and food will be on me. Make shore he's taken care of, Nip."

"Yes, sir," said Fuller. "C'mon, Blackjack."

SAYERS had turned away, again studying Jelliffe's note as Hatfield trailed Fuller out. The sheriff closed the door to the office. Hatfield was disappointed. He felt let-down. He had hoped to impress Sayers, and by posing as Jelliffe's agent, quickly work close to the real chief of the Panhandle trouble.

But it was not so easy. Plainly Sayers regarded him simply as a messenger boy. The boss was not as easy to impress as were his followers.

Dark had come by now. Bullhead Greggs, and some thirty to forty men were at the bar when Fuller and Hatfield entered the saloon. Some were sitting down, playing cards or dice. The smell of warm food came from the kitchen. The Ranger was hungry. He ate with Nip Fuller and Greggs, at one of the round tables, served by the Mexican lad.

"Some nice lookin' gals down the line," suggested Greggs after they had eaten. "Want to take a walk and see 'em, Kane?"

Greggs had accepted the "Messenger from Jelliffe." But even so there was a hint of challenge in the malformed man's manner. It was as though he did not fully like and trust this tall and self-contained ally.

"Like to later on, Bullhead," replied the Ranger. "Let's have a drink or two first. I got sort of tired makin' that ride, as I didn't stop much to sleep."

He was thinking, even as they chatted. He knew he did not have any too long. Jelliffe had a gang coming to Sayers' aid, and something else on which Sayers was evidently counting to destroy Meekham and Toll and their neighbors. He needed to discover what it was, this secret weapon, so he might overcome it.

Hatred came into the voices of his companions whenever they spoke of the Texans, whose properties and rights they had usurped and whom they blamed for seeking to regain their own. But with his mind on his work, at last an idea sparked to Hatfield.

"I got it!" he thought. "I'll try it right now!"

CHAPTER IX

A Philosophy of Terror

SAYERS raised his shrewd eyes to fix the Ranger's when Jim Hatfield for the second time that evening entered his den.

"What is it now, Kane?" he demanded, impatience in his voice. "I'm a busy man tonight."

"Gov'nor," said Hatfield, accenting the title, "I've got so many good ideas, I just had to speak, here and now. Will yuh give me a few minutes? If I don't interest yuh, throw me out."

Sayers inclined his massive head toward a chair, so that when the Ranger sat down his face was lit by the rays of the fine oil-lamp on the table.

"Mebbe yuh wonder about me callin' yuh Gov'nor," drawled Hatfield. "But that was Jelliffe's notion. He means to support yuh, and that's no secret."

"Does he?" Doc Sayers, at last, was touched. There was vanity in his make-up, and his ambitions burned high.

By slight signs, Hatfield knew he had struck the right note, and pushed his advantage. "Gettin' votes is one of my specialties, Doc," he said. "I do it one way or another—chiefly another. A club or a gun's even cheaper than payin' four bits for a vote. It's time to start thinkin' and workin' for next election. Jelliffe says yuh're the best man."

Sayers made a deprecating gesture with his hand, yet he was fascinated by the prospect which Hatfield conjured up. Texas was a great empire in itself. The Governor of that State would have tremendous power—and there was no saying how much higher a successful ruler might rise, once in the driver's seat.

"That's white of Jelliffe," Sayers murmured. "But mebbe there are others better qualified to act as chief executive of the State." His faulty eye flickered modestly.

"Shucks, don't say that, Gov'nor. Yuh're It, far as we go."

"Well, well — our Party's the important thing, no matter who's head of it. But we have a good many opponents, Kane."

"Right here's a good place to start gettin' rid of 'em." The Ranger lowered his voice, glancing around to make sure the door was shut. "When I rode through them wheat fields, I got to thinkin'. The papers say wheat's worth plenty. Must be thousands and thousands in them Rebel sections—a fortune. We'll need cash for the election fight. Why not pick it up here at home?"

A faint smile touched Sayers' lips. "So yuh noticed the wheat! Yuh've a good head on yuh, Kane."

"There's a war on in Cuba, and prices have jumped skyhigh. We finish reapin' and sell the stuff to the highest bidder."

"Yuh're forgettin' Meekham and his gang," reminded Sayers.

"Let's bust 'em up and take over."

"Easier said than done. Meekham and the rest have held us off. We have warrants for 'em, because they're outlaw here. Yet so far we've been unable to take 'em."

"How many do they muster?"

"Oh, forty to fifty."

"We got more riders'n that here in Colt City! If they ain't won out, it's the fault of yore field men."

Sayers shrugged. "I know that. My boy, yuh can get just so much fight out of hired guns."

Hatfield nodded, wisely. "Yeah, Jelliffe complains the same way. Them fellers talk mighty big and they'll go to it if they got the better of somebody, but let a stand-up-and-knock-down fight start and they'll back off to save their hides. I savvy 'em, Gov'nor. Thing to do is to give 'em the advantage they want so's they can operate."

"And just how do yuh propose to do that?"

The faulty eye flickered, riveted to the Ranger's face. Doc Sayers was a cruel, enemy, coldly merciless. He was no fool, either. The Ranger could sense the strength of his arch-enemy, whom he now sought to bait with ideas.

"S'pose yuh grab off the ringleaders of the Rebs—this Cap Meekham and Toll and whoever else yuh want to name for me," he suggested. "If I fetched 'em in for yuh, as pris'ners, what'd yuh say? I'd be worth a chunk of the money yuh get from the wheat, and mebbe a better job in yore organerzation, wouldn't I? I admit I got ambitions. I'd like to be the bodyguard of the Gov'nor of Texas and cut a figger in the capitol. With Meekham crossed off, these Rebs would make easy meat for our guns."

Sayers cleared his throat. "Go on, Kane," he ordered. "Yuh put things mighty plain sometimes but yuh've got interestin' thoughts."

"Meekham don't know me," said Hatfield. "None of 'em ever seen me. They won't surrender to Sheriff Fuller and his deputies, because they savvy he's yore agent. But there's a good chance they might surrender to a Texas Ranger."

The master's face tightened, and his lips set.

"A Texas Ranger! They're worse for us than Meekham's sort. Their power's growin' in the State, and they're against us. If ever I get to be Governor, I'll see to it the Rangers are changed. The only thing I'll keep is the name, mebbe."

HATFIELD leaned forward, lowering his voice. What he was doing was dangerous, but necessary.

"Ever figger that Meekham and Toll might've asked help of the Rangers?"

Sayers was deeply stirred. Again the Ranger had touched a sensitive spot with his probing.

"I've thought of it," he said, "and we've been on the watch. We'll deal with it when it comes up."

"It's already come up—and before long, it'll come agin."

"What yuh mean by that?" Heavy corrugations marked Sayers' brow.

"On the way over here, Gov'nor, I seen an hombre ridin' ahead of me. I got a habit of bein' careful, and so I come up on him after he went into camp just before dark. He was wearin' a silver star set on a silver circle—emblem of the Rangers. I hate them cusses. One killed my brother on the Nueces last year, and they even give me a chase once. I shot him first and—"

He opened his hand. In the palm lay the silver star, Hatfield's own emblem.

Sayers jumped. "Yuh killed a Ranger!"

"I went through his pockets before I dumped him. There wasn't much, but there was a slip of paper which had Cap Zeb Meekham writ on it, with directions how to reach his ranch. It must have been a Ranger sent out in answer to their call."

Agitated, Sayers jumped to his feet.

"Yes, yuh're right. They have been in touch with Austin. There's no time to lose! We've got to get rid of 'em!" He broke off, frowning.

"S'pose a Ranger pulled in to Meekham's," Hatfield said blandly. "Says he come to see justice done, answerin' their appeal. But he's got to take Meekham and a few others first, so's to clear 'em of some killin' charges lodged agin 'em. He guarantees to take 'em to a safe place where they can get help about their wrongs. What would happen?"

"I'm not shore but it might work if carried out right. Meekham, Toll and two or three others might consent to it, if they thought it would save their friends. A dangerous job, though."

"I'm the man for it," boasted Hatfield. "I'll try it, soon as I learn the layout of the country hereabouts. Somehow or other I'll fetch in Meekham and the other ringleaders of them dirty Rebs, where the boys can deal with 'em. Once under arrest—well, there's always the law of flight. They could be shot for tryin' to escape and so on."

"It would be better that way," muttered Sayers.

"Least I'd do would be to spy on their set-up and how they got their defenses arranged," urged Hatfield.

Sayers nodded. "Wait here," he said. "I must talk to somebody else about this before I can say go ahead."

Hatfield was startled. He had been certain that Doc Sayers was top dog. Was it possible there was someone even higher, someone for whom Sayers acted?

The big politician left the room. Hatfield tiptoed to the door, which Sayers had closed after himself. Listening, he heard a latch click down the hall toward the back. For a time then he heard only the sounds from the saloon in front.

It was not long until Sayers returned. He resumed his seat.

"We believe yuh've got a splendid idea, Kane," he said. "Frankly our patience with Meekham and his gang came to an end long ago. These Rebs have proved a mighty big drain on our pocketbook. We have to keep so many guards and fighters, and you know what I have to pay Jelliffe for aid. Listen! Have you ever heard of the White Gentlemen?"

"Fuller and the boys told me a little," said Hatfield. "It's a mighty fine idea, Gov'nor."

"One of my own modest contributions," said Sayers. "It makes a good political weapon. Yuh've got natural intelligence far above that of the ordinary gunny, my boy, so I think I can tell yuh that the White Gentlemen fit in with what we call the philosophy of terror. I expect to expand the organization for use throughout the State, as I take over control. Such men as we were discussin', hired fighters are braver when their faces are covered, hidden so's they can't be identified. Many a coward finds courage in the night, cloaked and hooded. I'll tell yuh more about that when we have the time.

"The first job then is to try to trick Meekham into surrender to you as a Ranger. We must, as I said, strike fast and before the Rangers do come here, and too much opposition builds up. In the next couple of days the White Gentlemen will drive the remainin' Rebs to Meekham's ranch. There they are outlaws, and can claim no lawful standing. We'll try to take Meekham your way, but if it don't work, of course we have the other."

"Yuh mean what Jelliffe's sendin'?"

SAYERS nodded. Hatfield could not press for amplification without proving himself ignorant of what he was supposed, as Jelliffe's agent, to know. And the interview was over for Sayers opened the door saying:

"Tell Sheriff Fuller I want to speak with him, Kane."

Hatfield strode to the saloon. Nip Fuller was at a table and rose as he was informed that Sayers wanted him. The Ranger followed along the hall as Fuller went to the chief's den.

When the gangling sheriff knocked on the boss' door Hatfield was at his shoulder.

"Wait outside, Kane," Sayers called.

Fuller entered and shut the door.

Hatfield moved toward the back of the house. There was only one remaining door between Sayers' quarters and the rear exit. It must be the door to the room into which Sayers had gone when he said he wanted to consult someone about Hatfield's—or Kane's—proposal.

The Ranger slouched to the door. Peeking in he saw only some dusty saddles and other gear, and there were some boxes of ammunition along the wall.

"Reckon what he said was to fool me," he decided. "He's a queer cuss. Like a fox."

Sayers was a man who liked to make use of figureheads, he thought, even imaginary ones. He preferred to pull a puppet's strings, rather than thrust himself into the limelight. Should he ever become Governor, such a high position might tempt him to emerge from his shadowy fortress, but he might even set another in the public eye, while maintaining the power behind his tool. So far, all the evidence pointed to Doc Sayers himself as the chief trouble-maker of the Panhandle.

The Ranger felt that he had accomplished a great deal with his spying. He must get everything straight before he made his final plans to crush the powerful organization which Sayers had built. It was perilous work, for they would kill him instantly if they suspected him.

The latch of Sayers' door clicked, and Hatfield turned to join Nip Fuller.

"C'mon, Kane," ordered the sheriff. "The White Gentlemen are ridin'. I'll furnish yuh with a hood and cape. Check yore guns."

CHAPTER X

Death Bait

KEN TOLL pondered on the ironies of life, now and then, when he could find the time for such thinking, for he had been extremely busy directing the reaping of the wheat crop.

It was evening and they had just come back from the fields, and he had washed up. Supper was not yet ready, and June was working with the other women to get it on the table for the hungry menfolk. The sun was a huge red ball over the vast escarpment of the Llano Estacado. The summer day was warm, the air sweet with prairie odors and drying grass.

Voices came from the bunkhouse and yard where the cowboys, turned reapers, and the Texans and their friends were talking together as they put away saddles and other gear. Mustangs had been turned into the corral at the rear of the ranch, where they might be guarded by the ever vigilant riders who stayed on the alert throughout day and night. The guard was changed at midnight, as a rule, but it was kept to a strict military routine by Captain Meekham. The fighters slept on their arms, ready to rush out in case of attack.

It was this constant threat which caused Toll to dwell on life's twists and turns. For years, Meekham and the disfranchised Rebels had been close to the end of the tether with food and other scarce necessities. Anything that required money, such as clothing, medicines, furnishings, had been practically impossible for them to obtain, since they had been impoverished by the War. They had existed on game, on beef, on what Nature afforded.

Then at last, through his wheat-growing scheme, they had turned the corner. Plenty of cash waited just ahead, once they had reaped the grain and sold it—money with which to buy stock and materials and fit themselves for life anew. More, the troops of occupation were withdrawing from the South, carpet-bag officials were on their way out.

"And now, it's a toss-up whether we'll be able to market our wheat even if we finish the reaping," Toll mused.

The White Gentlemen, under Doc Sayers and Sheriff Fuller, formed a worse threat to his friends than poverty and depression. The reaping had been slowed up, since they were forced to keep a number of men on guard both at the ranch and in the fields. They knew that Sayers was determined to crush them. And, up to now, he'd had local law officials with him.

There was one bright ray of hope in the situation. That had been the arrival of the Texas Ranger, Jim Hatfield. Ken Toll keeping his promise not to divulge the identity of the tall man on the golden sorrel, was the only one of the Texans who knew exactly who the Ranger was.

Toll had thrown in his lot, completely, with Meekham. He might have drawn off and saved himself. Sayers might have let him alone since he was from the North. Sayers might even have accepted his services to reap the wheat.

But such a course was unthinkable for Ken Toll. His love for June, his interest in the wheat growing, the warm nature which impelled him to help others, think of them before himself, had settled his course. Hurriedly, when the White Gentlemen had commenced their terrorizing, murderous forays, he had thrown some belongings into a wagon and transferred his headquarters to Meekham's ranch.

Many others had done the same, warned by the burning half circles in the night, by the gunning of neighbors and friends. Meekham had sent out a call for them all to band together to save themselves. There were still a few who had refused to leave their homes, however, and death hung over their heads.

Toll jerked his shoulders, half turning, with a frown on his face, looking toward the low, rambling white house. It was that quenchless desire in him to help those in trouble which made it so difficult for him to bear what he heard.

It was, among the other sounds, a child's crying. A little girl about seven was ill.

She was Jenny Addison who had come with her parents to the haven of Meekham's. Then she had been taken sick and the few home remedies there had failed to have any effect. She couldn't eat and she was growing weaker.

In Toll's mind was a picture of the child—so bright, so eager, underfoot all the time, of course, but sweet and a pleasure.

He went to the front door and entered. In the main room, Cap Meekham and some of his friends were sitting, tired from the long day's work, waiting for the dinner bell. Down the hall, in a small bedroom, lay the little girl. Her mother, face drawn with anxiety, sat quietly watching the child.

JENNY'S face was thin, and two red spots over the cheek-bones indicated her high fever. Her small hands were clenched and she was slightly flexed back. She was whimpering.

"How is she tonight?" whispered Toll. He found he was wringing his hands, for it was torture to look upon the sick child.

Mrs. Addison shook her head. "She's just had another convulsion."

"It's the fever. It must be brought down."

Toll swung, went out. He walked back to the living room and approached Meekham.

"Jenny's pretty sick, Cap," he said. "She needs attention."

Meekham looked at him. There were lines under Cap's eyes, and Toll realized that Meekham, holding them all, was tired. He would not admit it, but the strain was telling. He was not as young as he had once been when a dashing cavalry captain under Jeb Stuart.

"I savvy, Ken," he said. "I'd give my own life to save the child. But what can we do? There's no sawbones closer'n two hunderd mile. Sayers has us surrounded. He's got patrols watchin' the roads. If a man got through, by the time he could fetch back the doctor, the child would be past the peak of her sickness or—" Meekham shrugged.

Toll opened his mouth, meaning to ask Meekham if he might ride to his ranch. Then he just nodded, and went outside again. Cap had issued strict orders that no one was to venture away from the safety of their fortress unless he gave permission.

"He's got too much on his mind, now," Toll decided. "I won't bother him. But tonight I'll go after the medicine."

He had brought with him from the East a kit containing drugs and medicines unobtainable except in the larger cities of Texas. He had remembered that in the kit there was a drug, safe for a child, which ought to reduce Jenny's fever and so check the convulsions. But in the rush to get away from his home to join Meekham, the kit had been left behind. He had stored it in a tight box, against spoilage, and had kept it in a closet, on a high shelf. He hadn't been sick a day since reaching the warm, dry climate and had never taken it down.

If he insisted on going, Meekham would send men with him. But they would be in danger, riding at night across the country, for the White Gentlemen were often abroad in the dark hours. That would jeopardize the lives of his friends, and Toll shrank from it.

"I'll be better off alone," he thought. "I'll short-cut through the east field and reach my place. I'll be back before dawn, and the medicine may do the trick for Jenny."

He felt better when he had made this decision, for it tortured him to stand helpless, with someone in distress.

June smiled on him, as she served him his dinner. He touched her hand as she put down his steaming plate.

After he had eaten, he turned in and slept until midnight. The changing of the guard roused him. He dressed, took his gun-belt and pistol and went out into the yard. Horsemen, circling the ranch, showed against the lighter sky.

He picked his best horse and saddled up. The house was quiet, darkened, save for a candle burning in Jenny's room.

He mounted and moved slowly out from the yard, careful to call, softly, to the mounted sentinel. The guard came to him.

"It's Toll. That you, Marty?"

"Yeah. What's up, Ken?"

Marty Lee, a strong young son of Jeremiah Lee, a former Confederate officer, was at this post. He carried his rifle across the pommel, ready for action, and at his slim waist were six-shooters.

"Can't sleep, Marty," Toll said. "Thought I'd ride a bit and tire myself out."

"Huh! Wish I was in yore bed! I could sleep for a week. Been on guard duty four nights runnin' now, from midnight to six. But don't go far. Look over there."

With the black bulk of the barn and bunkhouse no longer interposing, Ken Toll saw the distant flare in the sky, a semi-circle of fire blazing on some hilltop to the south.

"The White Gentlemen!"

"They're out tonight, the skunks." Marty's strong hands tightened on his rifle. "Wish they'd come in my side, cuss 'em."

"They're a long way off."

"Can't say for shore, Ken. Sometimes one bunch hits here and another there, just to fool us."

Toll's home lay some miles above where the symbol of the White Gentlemen flamed. He nodded, easing his horse away from Marty's.

"I'll be back before long, Marty. Don't shoot me by mistake now. Tell the others I'm out."

"All right."

Toll was a trusted friend, a man with authority, second only to Cap Meekham's. It was a free country, too, and Marty Lee wasn't the kind to question a man too far.

AS TOLL faded into the darkness he glanced back and saw young Lee's dark figure there. He cut past the corral fence, and through the pasture. Coming to barbed wire that fenced in the wheat, he rode up to a turn where he could make time along a narrow trail between two of the sections.

When this swerved off, he knew of a gate in the fence, and he opened it, brought his horse through, closed the gate and rode along the upper edge of the wheat, softly rustling in the night wind. Far away, the burning circle still flared.

The miles slowly unrolled behind Toll. There was a moon and the sky was clear. He had plenty of light, and knew the way by heart. He eagerly pressed toward his objective, sure that the medicine would help Jenny.

Reaching the eastern barrier of barbed wire he dismounted, dropped his reins, and reconnoitered. Beyond, in its clearing, stood his house, black against the sky, deserted.

But he would check up. He crawled under the wire and stole toward a group of trees to the north of his home, and from that point of safety searched the yard and surroundings with his eyes before proceeding.

All was silent, save for the natural sounds of the great out-of-doors, the faint sigh of wind, the rustle of dry seed pods, the call of a bird off in the distance. Toll stole toward the kitchen door, keeping in the shadow away from the moon. His feet made scarcely any noise as he picked them up and set them down. There were no horses in the yard, nothing disturbed.

The door was shut, as he had left it. He lifted the latch carefully. It clicked metallically and he winced, wishing he had oiled it recently. The hinges, too, creaked when he pushed in the door.

He did not dare to strike a light when he stood in the dark, familiar kitchen. His own

[*Turn page*]

For thrifty shaves, keep this in mind—
You get the quick, slick, easy kind
With Thin Gillette, the low-priced blade.
Men, it's the sharpest one that's made!
New kind of edges on steel hard enough to cut glass
THIN
Gillette
BLADES
Gillette
4 for 10c
Produced By The Maker Of The Famous Gillette Blue Blade

breathing seemed loud in his ears, and a loose board unnaturally loud as his weight pressed down on it. To the right stood the iron cook stove, in the center was his table. The shelves ran up the wall to his left, and he tiptoed to them.

He needed a chair on which to stand, to reach the top shelf. He groped for one that he kept in the corner, but it was not there. For some reason or other, this disturbed him. He stood there, trying to think. Had he moved it before he had left? He couldn't recall having done so.

"Now, where—".

He turned, and tried to pick out the chair among the shadowed objects in the kitchen. A shaft of moonlight was coming through one of the windows, but outside of that it was dark. He crossed the strip of moonlight, feeling for a chair. With relief, he found one and, picking it up without undue noise, started back to the shelves.

Placing the chair, he climbed up on it. He knew right where the packet of medical supplies lay, and put his hand to it immediately.

There was a certain amount of danger in the venture. He had known that when he had started. It had been eerie, along in the night, sneaking into his own darkened home. Now the hackles seemed to rise on the back of his neck, and he shivered, though it was warm. He had an uncomfortable sensation, as he turned to get down from the chair seat, holding the package in his right hand.

"I'll be glad to get back to the ranch," he thought.

A breath later a sharp yellow flame stabbed the darkness, focusing him in its concentrated beam. He gasped with stunned astonishment, seeking to shift the packet from his right hand so he might draw his revolver.

"By Jupe, it's Toll!" an amazed voice exclaimed. "We got him! Reach, cuss yuh!"

CHAPTER XI

The White Gentlemen Are Riding

CLICK of a swift Colt, the cluck-cluck of cocking shotgun, sounded from behind the light.

Ken Toll was not familiar with guns, was slow and none too good a shot. He had handled them but little before coming to Texas, and he had turned his mind and energies to growing wheat rather than to arms. He had never fired on an enemy in the heat of battle.

"We'll blow yore insides all over that wall if yuh don't reach, Toll!" the threatening voice snapped. "There's three of us and we can't miss!"

Toll put up his hands, keeping hold of the packet in his right.

A moment later two men were upon him. They had his pistol, had run their hands up and down him, hunting other weapons.

"Five hundred dollars on the hoof!" one gloated. "It's ours, boys! Doc said he'd pay that for Toll, dead or alive!"

Sickness seized the pit of Toll's stomach. He realized now that his errand had been foolhardy. He should have brought help with him.

"Boys," he said hesitantly, "I came to get some medicine for a sick child. A little girl. She's got high fever and needs this. Will you let me take it to Meekham's—or will one of you deliver it?"

He knew by the laughter which followed that they thought it a joke, perhaps a ruse.

"Ain't that pitiful?" said the man with the light. "Here we sneak in and lay for yuh, hopin' yuh'd come along. We worked so hard to fix things so's nobody would savvy we was in here. Now we got to let yuh go!"

Toll braced himself. He loved life. He had won June, he had his work, and had hoped to save the Texans. That was over now. All he could do was face death the way a man should face it.

"You'll regret this, boys," he said quietly. "I suppose you're some of Sayers' men. You're killers, thieves, outlaws. Eventually you'll pay for the crimes you've committed in Texas."

"Dry up, yuh Yankee sidewinder!"

They cursed him, and suddenly fell upon him, hit him from two sides with fists and gun-barrels. Toll tried to fight, but he was half-stunned by a blow from a sharp Colt sight. Their weight knocked him off his feet, and he sat down hard on the floor.

It was the first time that any man had ever attacked Ken Toll with fists and club. In that instant, Toll's make-up changed. The philosophy of his life had always been peace, for he was the kind who avoided trouble, fighting.

Now, a rush of fury drove the blood pounding in his heart. The nails of his hands dug deep into his palms, his teeth gritted. Fighting rage mounted in his veins, and he leaped to his feet with a sharp, shrill cry. He swore, and had he had a gun he would have used it without compunction.

Arms flailing, he charged his enemies. They closed on him, swearing, hitting him, until the kitchen was a nightmare of violence and blood. . . .

And all the while, out in the vast spread of Panhandle country, the White Gentlemen were riding. Behind them burned their symbol of terror.

Jim Hatfield, Texas Ranger, rode among them. He was clad, like the rest, in the twin-peaked white hood, the flowing cloak which hid the identity of the man.

They had left Colt City the previous night, and made for the range. There had been an attack on a small ranch, but no one had been hurt. Fuller had held the White Gentlemen off. He had said their purpose now was to drive the Texans to Meekham's.

"We'll fix 'em when we get 'em at the Reb's," he had promised.

They had hidden and slept during the day. That evening, with a burning semi-circle lit by a confederate on a distant hill, the White Gentlemen had resumed their ride. Bullhead Greggs and Nip Fuller led them.

Fuller was instructing Hatfield, evidently in accordance with Sayers' orders. He had shown him the range, and when they had hidden in the woods, atop a rise, had pointed out the situation of Meekham's ranch, Toll's place and others, so that the new operative would know the territory.

NIP FULLER was field leader, and Bullhead Greggs was strongarm lieutenant. But it was obvious to Hatfield why the more determined Greggs was not in charge. He had no sense of balance. He was a bloodthirsty killer, swift with a gun, and eager to destroy. But he was heedless, stupid. Fuller had to restrain him from committing outrages needlessly wanton.

"Hey you, Bullhead!" he would order time and again. "Don't fire that buildin'! It's worth money, yuh fool!"

Now and then they did burn a small shed or barn in their campaign of terror, but Hatfield had discovered quickly that Doc Sayers expected to gain the ranches and homes, along with the wheat harvest.

Bullhead was quarrelsome, too, even among friends. It was necessary to check him when he started a fight. He had whiskey with him and after a few drinks what thin coating of veneer he had wore off. Savage, almost insanely egotistical, Greggs was one of the most brutal gunnies that the Texas Ranger had ever run upon in his work.

They were traveling the dirt road, approaching Meekham's vicinity, when an outrider came galloping back with a warning.

"Somebody comin' down the line, Nip!"

The White Gentlemen gripped their guns, getting their horses back off the road. It was late, perhaps three a.m. Dawn was not far away, though the moon was still high in the sky.

They heard the swift hoofs of the oncoming horse. The man rode right into them, and they spurred out of hiding, surrounding him.

"Don't shoot, boys!" he cried. "It's me—Sam! Where's Fuller?"

"Here I am, Sam. What's up?"

"We got Toll!" cried Sam breathlessly. "I was huntin' yuh—knew yuh'd be around. The fool walked right into our trap at his place."

"Yeah?" said the sheriff. "That's good news."

Bullhead Greggs gave a grunt of satisfaction. "Shore is, Nip. C'mon, let's get Toll. Where is he, Sam?"

"Artie and Lem are holdin' him at the house. We figgered we'd better have plenty of men to get him back to Colt City. Feared Meekham might be near and rescue him."

Greggs put his mustang out, past Fuller and Hatfield and Sam.

"Let's go!" he yelled, as he spurted off.

"Come back, Bullhead!" called Fuller, but Greggs either didn't hear or feigned not to.

"Remember, now, we get the re-ward for Toll's capture," reminded Sam.

"All right—all right. I hope Bullhead leaves enough to identify."

"That fool ain't goin' to kill Toll, is he?" growled the Ranger.

"Huh? He's awful hotheaded, is Bullhead."

"Doc needs Toll, Sheriff," objected Hatfield. "He's an expert on harvestin' wheat. We can use him. Sayers don't want him killed—yet."

"Well—" Fuller hesitated.

With a curse, Hatfield turned Goldy, and spurted after Greggs. Fuller gave the order to move, and they trailed him on the side way which led to Toll's.

It was a half hour's run. The sorrel was swift, and Bullhead Greggs was only a few jumps ahead of Hatfield when they reached the yard. A faint dawn light touched the sky. The house and sheds stood out, grayly, and horses and men were ghostly figures.

Greggs shed his white hood and cloak and threw the regalia over his saddle. Hatfield pulled up. Fuller and his other men were still a quarter mile behind, coming up the road. The Ranger removed his own hood and cloak, following Greggs' example. They hampered his movements.

He trailed Greggs to the back door.

"What yuh aim to do, Bullhead?" he asked.

The man grinned at him as he flung open the door.

"Want to see some fun, Kane? Watch me."

Greggs seemed completely happy. His malformed head was bare, showing the scalp that twitched. His ugly countenance was twisted.

There were two men in the kitchen, on their feet. They were standing over an unmoving figure on the floor. That was Ken Toll.

"Put on a light, cuss it!" ordered Bullhead. "I like to see 'em twitch."

The men there were afraid of Greggs, and obeyed.

"Now looka here, Bullhead," one of them objected, "he's ours. We get the re-ward."

"Yuh're welcome to anything I leave," growled Bullhead.

With a curse of rage, he jumped on Toll and raked his face with a sharp spur rowel. The pain caused Toll to regain consciousness. He moaned, and his eyes opened.

"Yuh Yankee scum, yuh sidewinder!" Greggs shook Toll violently. "I'm goin' to kill yuh, inch by inch! Toll, yuh hear me?"

HE DROVE a fist into Toll's mouth, and blood spurted from the split lip. Gloating, Greggs struck again.

Hatfield crossed the kitchen, seized Greggs by the shoulder. He pulled the man up, and shoved him aside.

"That's enough, Bullhead. Doc Sayers told me to capture Toll alive. He needs him."

The interference stunned Greggs. He turned, his mouth opening in a gasp of rage, and his little eyes sparked.

"Why, you—you dare to—"

He was swift, as quick as a flash, but as his hand reached his Colt butt, it froze in position.

He was staring into the black muzzle of the blue-steel revolver presented by Hatfield. Hammer spur back under thumb, the Ranger had him covered.

"Keep calm, Bullhead," he ordered coldly. "What I say, goes. We're savin' Toll for the Gov'nor."

Nip Fuller and the rest of the White Gentlemen were in the yard now, dismounting. The sheriff came in the door, saw the Ranger confronting the infuriated Greggs.

"What's all this!" he demanded.

Hatfield didn't want to lose his advantage with the enemy. If possible, he would save Toll without breaking his connection. He knew that Greggs was now his mortal enemy, would never forgive him, but he would handle the man.

"That big fool's protectin' Toll," snarled Bullhead, shaking with anger.

"Shore I am, Sheriff!" Hatfield said coolly. "Doc Sayers needs Toll. He said so last night. Now we got him, this jackass Greggs wants to kill him just for the sport of it!"

CHAPTER XII

The Fight

FULLER was torn between the two. He bit his lip, blinking, his hood hanging off his shoulders as he had pulled it back. Others were at the door, blocking it, staring at the strange scene.

Dawn was close at hand but the light was not yet strong. Fuller cleared his throat, his eyes flickered from the Ranger's.

"Yuh can ask Doc, Fuller," Hatfield insisted. "He means to harvest this Rebel wheat but it's got to be fast, or it'll be too late. Toll can speed up the work. He's the only expert in this part of the country. If Sayers says kill him when we return to town, why I'll tell Bullhead I'm sorry, and help him rake Toll apart."

The sheriff thought it over.

"That's fair enough," he finally said. "You calm down, Bullhead. If the Boss needs Toll we ain't goin' to hurt him."

Greggs turned angrily, stamped into the front room. The Ranger let his hammer down and slid his Colt back into its oiled holster. One thing he was sure of—he would never turn his back on Bullhead Greggs again, for the man was beside himself with hate.

Toll's hands were tied behind him, his feet secured by cords. Dark stains, Toll's blood, showed on the board floor of the kitchen. Now and then the young man would moan, twitch.

Nip Fuller went into the front room, and Hatfield heard him trying to pacify Greggs. More and more of the White Gentlemen crowded into the house. They took off the white robes and hoods, and settled down to drink and rest. Some food stores in Toll's pantry attracted them as well.

After a time, the sheriff's tall figure reentered the kitchen. It was filled with toughs, the gunnies who formed the bulk of the White Gentlemen. Bullhead Greggs had stayed in the other room, away from Hatfield, who had made himself comfortable not far from Toll, and where he could see through the connecting door into the front room.

"I want all hosses hid in the barn and sheds, boys, pronto," ordered Fuller. "We're stickin' right here for the day. It's as good a place as any to sleep and rest up."

His shifty, washed-out eyes touched the rugged face of the big Ranger, slouched with his back to the wall, his long legs bent, as he hugged his knees. Fuller's glance slid away from Hatfield's. He licked his brown lips and his prominent Adam's apple jumped convulsively.

"They suspicious of me?" wondered the Ranger. "Or has Greggs just talked me down?"

Though apparently relaxed, taking it easy among friends, actually he was ready for anything. The need to save Ken Toll had changed his status among them, and the poison of Bullhead's hatred was spreading. Though they had been ordered by Sayers to work with him, for he was supposedly an ally although not one of the local frame.

He had uncovered vital information through his dangerous contacts. He had accomplished a good deal by it, and had saved Toll so far. He hoped to learn more, especially the menacing secret of what Sayers had sent for, what Jelliffe was sending under

heavy guard. Doc was counting on this to destroy, completely, the growing threat to his power.

As red tinged the eastern sky Fuller's men began trooping out. They put their horses in the barn and sheds, unsaddling the animals so they might rest. The sheriff ordered the men all inside, after this was done. As the sun came up, Toll's would have a deserted look. There was nothing to warn of the gang's presence in the house.

Hatfield stayed in the kitchen, for he wished to make sure that Toll would not be knifed or mortally injured. Fuller was in the front room with Greggs. The two sat close together, with several of the White Gentlemen sprawled on the carpet near-by. Fuller and Greggs were talking in such low tones that Hatfield could not make out their words.

But the atmosphere had changed, so far as he was concerned. That was certain.

"Might as well face it—if there's anything to it," he decided, and got up, stretched, and strolled through into the front room.

Immediately, Greggs and Fuller ceased talking. Bullhead turned away and lay down, as though to sleep.

"How long yuh figger on stickin' here, Sheriff?" asked Hatfield.

"Oh, till afternoon, anyways. We need sleep." Fuller yawned, slouched lower against the wall. "Reckon I'll snatch forty winks myself. Wake me if anything happens, Kane."

SENSITIVE to mental impressions, Hatfield felt the coolness of the company. Nobody said anything but they did not seem eager for his society. After all, Greggs was a crony of Fuller's. They had ridden together, killed together. The big man, "Blackjack Kane," was from another organization, and he had interfered, on his own hook.

He glanced from the open side window. It looked out on the wheat fields toward Meekham's. The kitchen door opened to the north, but one west window there also gave out on the fields. Hatfield went back to the kitchen and his post near Toll.

The heavy cook stove shone in the morning light. It took up most of the corner to the right of the west window, with the door in the center of the north wall. Toll was lying under the shelves, left of the door and in line with the entry into the front.

Leaning with his own back to the wall, Hatfield half-closed his eyes; but he would not sleep. He could see Greggs' booted, spurred feet, the narrow toes pointing to the ceiling. Fuller was snoring next to him. Several of the gunnies in the kitchen were asleep.

He kept watch, long lashes and drooping lids covering his eyes as though he slept, but actually he could observe through slitted lids.

An hour later, he saw Greggs' feet suddenly shift their position. They drew up quickly, and he heard the faint scraping of leather, the tinkle of the spurs. Craning a bit he saw that Bullhead's toes pointed down now. By the position of the legs he realized that Greggs was looking out the west window as he knelt inside.

Troubled, suspicion flooded the Ranger. He had been busy watching, seeking to figure just how damaging had been his defense of Toll. He got up, and quietly went to the kitchen window giving out on the same side as that of the window through which Greggs was looking.

The sun was yellow now, the Panhandle flooded with the warming air. The graceful wheat waved in the wind.

Now he glimpsed what it was which Bullhead Greggs was watching. A man had just crept from the wheat, and in a flash had run lightly to pause behind a clump of brush.

As he watched he saw a couple more heads appear for an instant in the wheat.

"That looks a lot like Cap Meekham!" Hatfield thought.

It electrified him. In a flash he knew that he had permitted Greggs to set a pretty trap for Meekham.

"Of course they'd miss Toll and come huntin' him! Should have thought of it!"

Greggs had a baited mouse trap and no doubt had had someone watching for just this contingency. Other vital problems had been occupying the Ranger's mind, so that possibility had not been considered.

He had to act, instantly. For a breath he thought of firing a shot, as a warning to Meekham. But even as he was moving to the connecting door, he realized that the explosion might startle Cap, and cause him to jump up and run across the open space right in Greggs' sights.

As he reached the doorway, he saw Greggs drawing his bead.

There was a grin on Bullhead's ugly face as he steadied his rifle muzzle on the sill of the open window. And as the Ranger glided into the room, Cap Meekham, evidently finding all to his liking, jumped up and started toward the house. The sun's angle prevented Meekham from seeing into the window.

Hatfield had to shoot. The blue-steel Colt leaped to his hand with such speed that it blurred. Legs spread, he sent a slug into Greggs' right shoulder.

Bullhead's heavy rifle seemed to echo the Ranger pistol. Then Nip Fuller, all the White Gentlemen, were leaping to action.

Bullhead Greggs was howling in pain and with fury because of the balked kill. His rifle, jerked up by the smashing lead from the Ranger gun, clattered to the floor inside. Hatfield could see Cap Meekham, startled

by the shots, by the wailing heavy slug from Greggs' rifle, start zigzagging back to the wheat.

There were only three or four of the boys with Cap, but they opened up on the west windows, and their bullets came through, thudded into the wall, and prevented any attempt on Meekham for the time needed for him to dive into the wheat, right over the barbed wire fence, and disappear with his men.

But Hatfield had himself to think about now, and the helpless, semiconscious Toll.

Greggs was pulling himself together after the first shock. He turned his twisted ugly face, and saw the tall man in the kitchen entry.

"Get Kane! He's a wrong 'un! I told yuh he was, Nip!"

KILLING blood surged into Bullhead. With his left hand he snatched out a revolver, and tried to get it up, to drill the Ranger. Hatfield fired again, this time with no compunction.

The crouched Greggs caught it in the breast, and crashed back, dead before gravity settled his blunt body to the mat.

Nip Fuller, fright in his bleary eyes, fell flat on the floor, behind Greggs' carcass. He was screaming to his men, in a high-pitched, terror-stricken voice. Gunnies, frozen by the swift smashing blows of the Ranger, stared wide-eyed at the commanding figure.

But there were killers behind him, and he must save Ken Toll.

He jumped back into the kitchen. Unable to see what had occurred in the other room, the men in there hesitated.

"Hustle, boys!" bellowed the Ranger. "Meekham's gang are bustin' through the front door! Pronto!"

Two or three ran into the front room. The first took a bullet from a rattled comrade's gun, a man who had thought he was the tall fellow. Hatfield seized another White Gentleman by the shoulders and shoved him through the opening. Quickly he cleared the kitchen, as the hullabaloo filled the other room.

"Get him, yuh fools!"

His Colt was up and ready. A blast from it cleaned the entry, and he slammed the door and bolted it. They began shooting through. Crouched low, he seized Toll's trussed ankles and pulled his young friend across the floor to safety, out of line with the connecting door.

But this only gave him a breathing spell to count in seconds. He lifted Toll, and placed the moaning man in the corner behind the heavy cook stove where he took his own position in front of Toll, with the cover of the iron.

It should prove an effective barricade for a time, at least.

CHAPTER XIII

Trapped

BARELY was Hatfield settled when Fuller's men appeared at the west window and fired in. A bullet sang an inch over the Ranger's black-haired head. Another clanged into the stove, bits of lead flying.

There were three places to watch—the connecting door, which some had began banging at with a chair, the door to the outside, and the window. The exploding guns, the shrieks and howls of rage from the White Gentlemen, the clang of the metal as slugs repeatedly hit the stove, made an indescribable din. The Ranger's ears rang with the discord, the shouts of hate from his enemies.

A couple of well-placed bullets made them chary of rising in the window, against the lighted sky, to try for him. The connecting door gave, and he put a bullet through a hand groping to pull the bolt. Someone yelped in agony, and the hand was spasmodically withdrawn.

Then the door was smashed in with a chair used as a battering-ram. Now they could fire from the other side of the doorway, but the Ranger sent splinters flying, and none was too eager to try for him.

The back door was along the wall to his left, and there was about a foot of space between the stove and the panel. He had to watch that carefully, for already they had kicked in the unlocked back entrance.

He could see the window from the corner of his eyes, but the bulk of the stove gave protection from anyone there. A shotgun was thrust around the inner edge of the door and he had to shoot quickly. His bullet hit the barrels and shook the aim as the buckshot blasted and scattered.

One chunk of lead caught him in the left leg. He felt the tear of it in the flesh, and though the blood began to flow in his boot, he knew it was not too bad. The shock was light, and he pushed back closer to the wall, so the angle grew more difficult for them.

There was a short lull. Evidently his foes were consulting. Nobody wanted to stick his head in the window, or through the doors. Hatfield took the few moments to cut Toll's bonds. He shook the young man, but Toll was dazed, weakened by the abuse to which he had been subjected.

Hatfield heard a heavy rifle explosion outside, just behind him. The wall shook a bit and splinters appeared in the cedar paneling directly back of him. They were trying to shoot through the wall and pin him that way, but the slug, while it nearly made it—enough to disturb the inner wall—had not

emerged through.

Next came a whole volley and the wall trembled. Some of the heavier-charged bullets cracked the panels but the wall was thick enough to stop them.

With hot guns freshly loaded, he pressed to the wall.

Then Nip Fuller tried another trick.

"Hey, Blackjack Kane!" the sheriff called.

"What yuh want, Sheriff?"

"Yuh better come out. What's the idea? Ain't we yore friends? Doc Sayers told me to help yuh along. We was sore when yuh downed Bullhead, but we've decided to let bygones be bygones. He was goin' to kill yuh, so yuh only protected yoreself. Let's get out of here pronto. We'll ride back to Colt City and yuh can lay it all before Doc. I give yuh my word yuh won't be hurt."

Hatfield grinned at the clumsy attempt to draw him forth where they could shoot him down.

"All right, Nip," he called. "After all, Greggs started it, not me. He meant to kill me, so I had to take him first. I'll see yuh in Colt City tonight. You and the boys go ahead, and I'll foller."

He waited. Unable to trick him into emerging, the infuriated Fuller tried again. Hatfield heard faint creakings as the men outside moved near.

Suddenly men appeared at the windows, at the connecting door, at the outer portal. They were trying to rush him, confuse him. Their pistols roared, filling the kitchen with smoke and lead, and they howled like wild beasts approaching a kill, a pack of wolfish devils bearing down on their prey.

Cool of head, he fired rapidly, now—at the window, the door, the other entry. His bullets quickly threw them back. They were not the sort to die for a cause, and they fought to get away from the tearing Ranger death.

There was another lull, though he could hear their voices outside, the tread of their boots. They were determined to get him.

He strained his ears. He had hoped that perhaps Cap Meekham had brought enough men to drive them off, though there were a good many with Fuller. But he heard nothing that might uphold such a hope.

HIS ears still rang with the fight. His whole left boot was filled with blood, it seemed, and the numbness was wearing off. The leg ached. He shook his head, against the pounding in his eardrums. Thirst assailed him, the thirst that comes after terrific danger and exertion.

Ken Toll was stirring. He moaned, grunted. His eyes were clearing although he was in great pain, and as weak as a kitten.

He looked up at the Ranger's set, rugged face.

"Jim—it's you?" he whispered. "Where . . . Are we still at my—"

"Yeah, Toll, we're in yore kitchen, behind the stove. Fuller and the gang are after us. But we'll get out, safe and sound. I had to down Bullhead Greggs, to keep him from killin' you."

"Yes, I remember—he jumped on me."

The Ranger, forced to watch the openings into the kitchen, suddenly sniffed.

"Wood smoke!" he muttered.

It was drifting in the west window, blown by the wind. The billows grew thicker, and as the Panhandle breeze puffed hard, it blew the licking red flames into sight. The killers brought dry tinder, cut brush and hay, limbs and firewood from the woodshed, and piled it against the wooden wall, to smoke him out!

The smoke grew heavier, and the Ranger coughed, his eyes watering, stinging with the acrid vapor. He began to feel the heat of the bonfire as it blistered the outer walls, and Fuller's men fed it, back out of sight.

He had fought to the end. He had been forced to expose his hand, in order to save Toll and then Meekham from the murderous Greggs and his riding mates, the White Gentlemen.

"I ain't goin' to run out till I have to," he decided. "I hope Goldy got off from 'em, before they roped him."

The sorrel would not submit to strangers if he could help it.

He knew they were waiting out there, with guns leveled, ready to shoot him down as he fled from the burning building. Sweat made runnels in his dust-caked face. The heat grew worse, and he shifted so that the stove was between him and the fire. He was at the end of the tether as he gripped his Colt.

"Reckon I'll take one or two more on the road with me," he muttered.

His eyes smarted and it was difficult to see clearly now. And Toll was coughing, weakly.

"Jim—you there?" he rasped.

"Yeah, I'm here, Toll."

"What's goin' on? Have they set fire to the house?"

"They've set fire to the house."

"Can—can't we get—" Toll was seized with a spasm of coughing that shook him, hurt his wounds.

The Ranger stood up, to try his injured leg. It would hold his weight, but it hurt. He quickly squatted down again, for the smoke was thicker up above, the heat much worse.

Dark spots danced before his eyes, and he nearly fell over but saved himself with his hand to the floor. He shook his head, trying to clear it. His throat was sore, and it was painful to draw in the sickening, smoke-laden air.

"Time to get out," he said aloud, his head

dancing. His heart beat with sledge-hammer distinctness.

He gathered up Ken Toll, supporting the tall young fellow with his left arm. It was all he could do to keep his balance, and he leaned back to the wall, pushing his shoulders against the upright barrier to keep from falling over. Dragging Toll, who was unable to stand up, and with his Colt loaded and in his hand, the Ranger made for the exit into the yard.

They would be waiting to kill Toll and him.

The smoke drafting through forced him down. Closer to the floor he found he could breathe near the door, the fresher air by the opening giving him a respite before death.

Intent on making a last fight, with the roar of the fire in his bursting ears, his lungs crying for more air, air that wasn't poisoned by smoke, the Ranger inched to the sill, dragging Toll behind him. He was set on getting one or two White Gentlemen before he died. In his fevered brain that had became an obsession, the gallant attempt of a true fighting man to go down with guns blazing, defying odds.

The smoke, his watering eyes, made it impossible for him to see in the drifting vapor. He thought he could make out vague shapes of foes waiting there for him and, dropping Toll, he threw up his Colt and opened fire.

He was braced for the ripping death lead from all sides that would finish him.

THE air was much better for his head and shoulders were outside the door. He drew in great gasps. There was smoke, but nothing like the horror of the kitchen. His eyes cleared a bit and, revolver rising, he hunted for his enemies to make his fight.

A great hope suddenly swept over him. It brought back to his lagging muscles the final reserves of strength in his strong body. He reached for Toll, turning to shoulder him, and pushed erect, carrying the helpless man from the house into the yard.

The crackling fire had that ominous deep-throated sound of a well-set blaze. But now the wind brought faintly in his still pounding ears the crackle of gunfire.

Shrill whistles issued from the Ranger's lips. He moved on, but was forced to pause, to rest himself. Goldy, with the White Gentlemen horses, had been placed in the outbuildings.

Into the puffs of smoke the Ranger moved. Then he saw the ghostly shape of the sorrel trotting up.

"Goldy!"

He gripped the sorrel's mane, to support himself. It took a great effort to hoist Toll up and across the bare-backed mount, for he had unsaddled earlier, when he had put the gelding away in the barn. Then he mounted, his injured leg aching as he tightened his grip on the barrel ribs.

CHAPTER XIV

Texan Guns

GOLDY, guided by pressure, turned and moved north from the smoke. The wind blew the fire south, against the kitchen wall. Beyond this, the air was clean and fresh, the sun bright.

The Ranger, head bent, holding Toll with one hand, picked up speed as he made for the wheat field on the west.

"There they are!" he murmured. Then sang out: "Meekham. It's Jim—Toll! Don't shoot!"

Cap Meekham and a number of Texans were lying in the wheat. They were shooting past the house at the White Gentlemen, who had taken cover behind the barn and sheds. Their bullets had driven back Nip Fuller's gang and given Hatfield time to escape.

Past the bulk of the house, with its entire west wall ablaze, Hatfield heard the whining of enemy lead, but kept going as fast as Goldy could run. Meekham recognized the horse, then the rider. He and his men kept their guns on the enemies beyond.

Meekham, in command, had cut the top strand of barbed wire between two poles. Goldy, stopped by the Ranger, could step over now into the wheat. Hatfield slid off, bringing Toll with him, and sent the sorrel running into the wheat. He had seen Meekham's horses well back in it.

Cap Meekham, a carbine in one hand, rushed to him.

"Yuh got Toll! Nice work, Hatfield. We been mighty worried. Yuh hurt?"

"Not too much," gasped the Ranger. "Toll's beat up but he ought to pull through."

A bullet shrieked past his head.

"Down!" ordered Meekham. "Everybody keep low!"

Meekham had about twenty fighters with him. Fuller's gang outnumbered them, but would not charge the wheat.

"We might as well sashay, Cap," suggested the Ranger. "We can't save the house, and Toll needs attention. Got any water with yuh?"

Cap Meekham passed him a canteen. Hatfield gave Toll a drink, then poured water into his own flannel-dry mouth.

Meekham was signaling a fighting retreat to the horses. Ten men stayed on the line, just behind the barbed wire barrier, shooting hard to hold Fuller. The rest, including Toll and Hatfield, made for the horses and mounted. Then the other ten men ran swiftly to them, and the party rode west, along the fence, for home.

The White Gentlemen, howling and shoot-

ing, came after them, but the snarling guns of the rear guard kept them at a respectful distance. After a mile, they quit, with a final burst of long-range fire.

Meekham pushed his horse up beside Goldy. They had Toll mounted, secured so he wouldn't fall off, and were headed for the ranchhouse.

"How'd yuh get in there, Hatfield?" asked Meekham. "We missed Toll, and Marty, one of our sentries, said he'd rode off this way. Tried to trail him but it was light before we could pick up his tracks. I found 'em in the wheat, along the fence, and figgered he'd ridden over home without tellin' me. Three of us pressed on. Toll's looked deserted, but his hoss was hid back in the wheat and I knew he must be there. But when I started in, I was fired on and near downed. Had to run, but I connected with some of the boys and we hustled back in hopes of savin' Toll."

"Yuh done noble, Cap," declared Hatfield. "Yuh hit it just right so's Toll and I could escape. Yore drivin' 'em back from the house saved us."

"But how in tarnation blazes did yuh get in there? How is it both Toll and you wasn't killed. That's what beats me—that yuh had any chance to run for it."

As they rode, Hatfield explained.

"I'm a Texas Ranger, Cap. My handle is Jim Hatfield, and I ride for Cap'n McDowell of Austin. Didn't tell anybody but Toll, who wrote McDowell, that I was an officer and had come to try to help out here. I like to look things over before I go to work."

Meekham whistled. "A Ranger! So that's the ticket. Yuh look fitten to be one, Hatfield. Rangers got a fine name in the State. Ain't yuh had trouble, too, with the carpet-baggers, though?"

Hatfield nodded. "Yeah, but now that the Texans are gainin' political control, Cap, we'll take over more'n more. We been workin' right along, quiet-like, doin' the best we can. The Rangers are with you folks, and we got to fight together to beat Doc Sayers and his kind. Sayers has ambitions. He's spreadin' his hold and hopes to be Gov'nor one day, if he can build up a powerful enough organization. He's connected with other gangs throughout the State who mean to back him and help him clean out the decent folks who oppose him."

HATFIELD quickly told Zeb Meekham how he had come to the Panhandle, of the fight at the beacon of how he had actually ridden among the White Gentlemen, and then, posing as Jelliffe's messenger had tricked Doc Sayers.

"I was with Fuller when news of Toll's capture come to 'em," he said. "I trailed Bullhead Greggs and had to fight to keep him from killin' Toll then and there. It sort of cooled 'em toward me. Then Greggs had a bead on you, Cap, and I killed him. Grabbed Toll, and got behind the kitchen stove. They set fire to the house, but you hit in time to get us out. That's all."

Meekham's eyes were wide with admiring amazement.

"That's all!" he cried. "Ain't it enough, Ranger? I can read between the lines. A brave hombre like you don't boast. It's the greatest scrap I ever heard tell of! I been cap'n in these parts, but I'm offerin' you the palm here and now. You give the orders and we'll foller 'em out. Can we beat Sayers?"

"I hope so. We'll shore try. Got to check him or he'll pizen the whole State. When I talked with Doc the other night in his office he seemed mighty shore of wipin' you out, Meekham. He's got some sort of trick up his sleeve connected with Jelliffe, somethin' Jelliffe's sendin'. That's what had me thinkin', and we got to find out what it is."

Hatfield's boot was still filled with blood, and his leg ached. The rugged face was set in stern, weary lines, the cords taut. The smoke had irritated his lungs and eyes and he was done in. But his iron nerve and the tag end reserves of his physical power held him up.

When they reached the Meekham ranch, the sentries sang out a cheer as they saw their friends returning with Ken Toll and the tall man.

June and the other women awaited them in the yard.

"Ken—Ken, where were you?" cried June. "Oh, you're hurt!"

"He's goin' to be all right, honey," Meekham told her, as he supported the still dazed Toll, so weak he couldn't stand alone.

"June!" said Toll hoarsely, essaying a smile. It was a strange grin for his lips were swollen, his face bruised and cut from Bullhead Greggs' abuse. "I went for medicine for Jenny—was sure it would help her. They captured me but Hatfield saved my life. I didn't get the medicine. It's burnt up. I'm sorry."

"So that's why yuh slipped off thataway!" exclaimed Meekham. "I s'pose yuh figgered I wouldn't have let yuh go if yuh asked so yuh lit out alone. Well, yuh're right. I wouldn't have allowed it, and I'd shore have been right."

"Jenny—is she—?" Toll's eyes were distressed.

"She's much better today, Ken," declared June. "This morning she woke up after a nice sleep, almost normal and able to drink some hot chicken broth. You shouldn't have gone for the medicine, but it was a brave thing to do." She kissed his cheek, and helped her father take Toll inside the house, to his bed.

The irony of it touched the Ranger—Toll

risking his life to fetch medicine for a sick child, who promptly had recovered without it. Quixotic as the errand had been, it was an admirable trait in Toll's character, this helping of others.

"He's a fine boy," he mused. "I'm mighty glad I was there."

But he needed rest. He limped to the watering trough, and cared for Goldy before himself. Unsaddling the sorrel, he rubbed him down, watered him lightly, and turned him into a pasture corral to graze. Then he could think of himself.

Mrs. Meekham had a huge kettle of hot water, and helped him cleanse and bind the flesh wound in his leg. She insisted on washing out his boot, and set it in the sun to dry. Her womanly solicitude and care helped immensely. She brought him a bowl of warm broth, and stood over him until he had drunk it all.

"Now you must go to bed and stay till you're over the shock, Jim," she insisted.

She smoothed the cot for him, and the Ranger murmured his thanks, as he stretched out.

It was delicious to relax after the long strain. He shut his eyes.

"That cussed Sayers and his White Gents are workin' without stoppin' to beat us," he thought. "I'll have to get after 'em soon as I'm rested some. Got to find what they're up to. Now, I wonder what they are fetchin' in that they're so shore'll wipe out Meekham and his pards?"

Sleep claimed the mighty Ranger. Nothing, not even the awful death threat hanging over the Panhandle range, could hold back its insistence.

CHAPTER XV

Caravan of Mystery

"REACH high, Sayers! Texas won't stand for polecats like you!"

Jim Hatfield started awake, to the realization that he was dreaming. He had dreamed that the moment had come to arrest Rudolph Sayers, the outlaw whose political ambitions encompassed the complete enslavement of the decent citizens of the great Lone Star State, and the seizure of its untold wealth.

He grinned at his fancies, shaking his head, and sat up. He tried his wounded leg. It was stiff and sore, and he gritted his teeth as he put his weight on it, but it would hold him.

It was dark. The little room in which he had been sleeping gave off the west wing of the roomy ranchhouse. Through an open door into the side corridor came the yellow rays from an oil-lamp burning in the front room. There was a low murmur about the place, from the many people who were staying there under Meekham's protection, victims of Sayers' ambitions.

"Is there time?" he mused.

Time! It was always vital. Hatfield was too good a field general not to realize its importance.

The demands of human endurance had forced him to pause for rest, and to recover from the fight he had undertaken in Ken Toll's behalf. He had had to sleep, to regain his power, but he knew that even as he slept Sayers' agents would be at work. There were many of them, enough to keep at it in relays.

Supper hour was long past. Mrs. Meekham was sitting in the big front room, with some of their neighbors. When she saw the tall Ranger, she smiled, rose and came to him, looking up into his face. She touched his hand.

"Come with me. You're starving, I know. Zeb has told me how you saved his and Ken's life and how you're fighting to help us all. We're grateful."

"Thank yuh, ma'am. How's Toll?"

"Much better. He managed to describe some of the battle at his place. He gave us an idea of how wonderful you were."

"Wasn't much, ma'am." The praise embarrassed the tall man.

The food she set out did not, however. He ate enough for two ordinary people—beef and fried eggs, home-made bread with molasses, beans, cups of steaming, sweetened coffee, pie made from dried apples. It was a glorious thing to be really hungry and to be able to eat. It satisfied a man's soul.

Cap Meekham grinned at him when he found the leader of the ranchers in his chair by the big stone hearth. Hatfield rolled a quirly, to smoke after his meal.

"Feel better, Ranger?"

"Yes, suh! Yore wife's a mighty fine cook, Meekham. Best meals I've had in a long time."

The praise pleased them all. The Texans looked upon the tall Ranger with trust and affection, for the name of the great organization to which he belonged was a passport in any decent society. There were few of them in number but every one was worth an army of common fighters, and Hatfield, McDowell's best man, stood even above his fellows.

Hatfield spoke with Meekham, in a low voice.

"Cap," he said, "we can't sit here any longer, just waitin' for Sayers to hit as he pleases. We got to go out after him and bust up his plans."

"Suits me, Ranger. Give the word and we'll foller yuh to the devil and gone. So far, though, Sayers has had more men than we have and he's in better position. I sort of

hoped we might shove him out in the fall elections, after we'd got the wheat reaped and sold."

The Ranger shook his head. "Sayers and his kind ain't goin' to quit without a big fight. He's got his hooks throughout the State already, signin' up allies like this Jelliffe. Time's precious. While we're sittin' here talkin', Sayers is actin'. We've give him the chance to send for reinforcements—and there's some secret plan he's got worked out which he's shore'll finish yuh all off. I worked in, hopin' to find out what it was, but I wasn't far enough along to find out what he's expectin'. It's got me worried. Yuh any notion what it might be that Sayers is countin' on?"

Meekham shrugged. "Explosives?"

"Mebbe. But throwin' a bomb means men have to run in close. From what I've seen of the White Gentlemen, they ain't eager to make heroes and corpses of theirselves."

Meekham spat into the fireplace. "They're crawlin', yeller dogs, Ranger! They ain't men enough to fight it out unless they got three to one odds or more. Why, with my boys it'd take a thousand of 'em to get in here! I'll guarantee to hold 'em off forever!"

"Yuh got plenty ammunition?"

Meekham grinned and winked. "I got plenty. Enough for a war. That's one thing I made shore of, and Toll put up the money."

"I reckon I better start out and try to find out what Sayers is up to, Cap. Can yuh give me a half dozen good, tough fightin' men who know the country well?"

"Shore. Yuh want me to go along?"

Hatfield shook his head. "You stick here and guard the fort."

"The boys'll want to go—Vance and Tim. And yuh can take Marty, Lew and Shorty, and any other yuh fancy, Ranger. We're with yuh till—"

HE BROKE off. A gunshot, followed by shouts, had sounded in the night.

The guards were coming in, calling the alarm. Armed men rushed out, to do battle, led by the Ranger and Meekham. A horseman rode up, one of Meekham's sentries. He was leading a team of horses, attached to a wagon, in which cowered a woman and three children. On the seat was a man with a shattered arm, his face grim, drawn. He had been wounded by a rifle bullet.

"We—made it, Meekham!" he gasped. "The White Gentlemen are out! They chased us here."

"I'm glad yuh've come, Descartes!" cried Meekham. "I invited yuh and yuh should've come before they hit yuh. C'mon, we'll take care of that wound, and put the kids to bed. . . . Howdy, Mrs. Descartes."

The hearty Meekham and his followers assisted the family into the house. The Ranger moved out past the barn. Howls and shots rang in the darkness, and on the plain south he could see figures in white, the White Gentlemen who had pursued Descartes and his wagon to the ranch. They did not venture too close, for Meekham's fighters were out, shooting at them.

On a rise beyond, the broken circle, symbol of the night riders, flamed in the sky.

But the White Gentlemen did not stay. They turned, whooping and firing, and rode off. Hatfield went back to the house. He learned from Meekham that Descartes was owner of a small spread over twenty miles away, and was not a member of the wheat-growing organization. He was a veteran of the Confederate Army, however, and sympathetic to Meekham.

"Reckon Sayers is spreadin' his grip, and riddin' the country of all who might oppose him," the Ranger decided.

Why had the White Gentlemen driven Descartes in to Meekhams? In the past few days, several others from distant ranches had arrived, run from their homes in the same manner.

"Looks like Sayers is runnin' 'em all here," he mused. "Mebbe figgers it'll be handier to wipe 'em all out at once."

Restless, aware of Sayers' strength, the Ranger gave the word to Meekham. The riders promised him were saddling up, and he called Goldy, slapped his hull on and cinched up. With plenty of ammunition in belts and pockets, carbines in slings, and loaded Colts in their holsters, Hatfield led half a dozen tough young fellows from Meekham's on his patrol.

They kept going through the night, hitting the out-road along which Hatfield had come to the Panhandle.

They moved in a column, with Hatfield out in front and Vance Meekham as rear guard. The White Gentlemen were abroad, though the flaming beacon had died away, burned down. Ready for a scrap, the Ranger peered into the moonlit distance ahead. On fast mustangs, and armed to the teeth, he believed they could fight off and escape from any white-clad bands they might encounter.

When the dawn came up, they were many miles from the ranch and Colt City. Pulling off the dirt trail, Hatfield found a hilltop, screened by dense brush and growths of cedars and pines.

"All right, boys," he said. "Take it easy and have a cold snack. Don't smoke, though, till we made shore we're clear."

He had a pair of field-glasses in his saddle-bags, and with these, he climbed to the summit of a rocky eminence, and swept the lightening land, studying each area of terrain. He could see the endless, winding ribbon of the clay road. Stretches of it were visible, save where the contours hid it from his view.

There was nothing. He went back, and with the others had a cold meal of salted meat, water and bread, then a smoke. Some of the boys dozed, resting after the ride.

The sun came up, yellowing the eastern sky. It was difficult to see eastward but after it had risen well, Hatfield kept returning to the knoll to study the road.

"Here they come!" he finally muttered. He went back to his men.

"There's two wagons on the trail, boys," he informed. "I figger what's in 'em is what Sayers is waitin' for. There's a powerful gang of hombres guardin' em."

The dust rolled up under the iron-sheathed wheels. The heavy wagons moved slowly, with six mules to each vehicle straining at the loads. He counted the riders with the wagons. There were thirty-five of them, besides the two men on the wagon seats.

"Jelliffe's gunnies, fetchin' it in," he muttered.

NOW they were closer, and the men hidden on the hill could all observe the approach of the new enemy, the reinforcements for Sayers. And through his magnifying lenses, Hatfield could make out the bearded features and clothing of the man driving the first wagon. He wore a soldier's cap cocked on his head.

Vance Meekham came over, touched his arm.

"Ranger! Look back west on the trail!"

Hatfield, concentrating on the wagons and figuring whether they might stampede the crew by ambush and wild attack, turned to see what had roused Vance. Along the road streamed horsemen, bunches and bunches crowding and filling the highway. Sheriff Nip Fuller and his lieutenants, were among them, with the rank and file composing Sayers' White Gentlemen. Hatfield recognized a number of them, whom he had seen in Colt City, and at Toll's.

"Fifty to sixty," he said thoughtfuly.

They were not wearing their cowardly night raiment but were armed to the teeth, and on the alert.

They pushed on, and soon sighted the caravan. Hoarse shouts sounded, and shots of welcome were fired in the air, as the two gangs joined forces about the wagons.

"Why," growled Vance Meekham, "we couldn't beat that gang with them wagons, not if we had all our boys here, Ranger. There's too many and they'd have the wagons for cover."

Hatfield nodded, his face grim. He could guess what had occurred, and realized that his first plan to attempt to seize whatever it was that Doc Sayers was importing to destroy the Texans was ruined.

Sayers, informed of the supposed Blackjack Kane's perfidy, had realized that the tall man knew of the expected caravan. He had countered by sending this powerful force to meet the wagons and Jelliffe's crew and escort them to Colt City.

"What yuh figger's in them big canvas-covered crates, Jim?" asked Tim Meekham curiously.

Hatfield shrugged. "I don't know. But I mean to find out, boys."

CHAPTER XVI

Blanket Dread

WHILE the great array of killers and the the wagons passed below on the road, Hatfield's party stayed hidden, their horses muzzled with bandannas, to prevent any whinnying which might expose them. Once the caravan was well by, Hatfield moved down, but the long stretches made it impossible to trail closely, since he and his men would be seen by the enemy.

He allowed the foe to get several miles ahead before taking after them.

It was slow riding, for the wagons could not make much time. By the volume of dust in the sky ahead, not yet entirely settled as they came along, he could judge the progress of the party toward Colt City.

At last, in the afternoon, he pulled up.

"They've stopped, boys," he told them.

"They're at Hickory Bridge, over the river," declared Vance.

"That's right. I remember the bridge. Come over it a couple of times goin' and comin'. Wonder what's holdin' 'em up?"

The Ranger left them, and rode as far as he dared. Then he dismounted and, keeping low, crept to the last rise before the land gently dipped to the river valley. Shading his field-glasses, he peered down at the enemy, who had pulled up on his side of the bridge.

They were taking the opportunity to smoke, drink, and rest. Many were lying on the ground, talking with Jelliffe's men. But some were busily engaged about the bridge. The Ranger watched, curious.

The span was of wood planks nailed to long logs. In the center of the river, on a flat rock rising above the surface of the water, were thick timbers which supported the middle of the structure.

Hatfield could see the bridge and the upper parts of these supports, but the men working in the dip were out of sight. He observed them only as they came up or went down the bank.

It was a full hour before the wagons moved on. The afternoon was well along, the sun hot, bright yellow in the flawless blue sky. The Ranger rejoined his men.

"What they waitin' for?" Vance and Tim

wanted to know.

"I ain't shore." Hatfield shook his head. "Looked to me they was testin' the bridge."

"That's funny," said Tim. "It's strong enough for hosses, and I've crossed it many a time with a wagonload, too."

"It does wobble some, though, when you go it at a gallop," observed Vance Meekham. "And looks like they mean to take somethin' plumb heavy across it."

They let the enemy get well ahead moving on toward Colt City, not far away. The Ranger was first to reach the bridge. He dismounted again after sending Vance and Tim ahead to watch in case any of the foe doubled back. He could see the marks in the soil of the bank where men had come up and down.

Now he studied at close range the flat rock outcrop which held the bases of the main uprights in the middle of the stream. These posts were a foot through and strong. But there had been floods at various times, and the wooden posts had begun to rot in spots. The drivers of the wagons had dug their knives into these, checking up, fearing the bridge might not hold their loads. Hatfield could see the fresh knife marks.

"Doggone, they must be heavy!" he thought. "Plumb heavy, like Vance said."

His practised eye studied the bridge. He had some knowledge of engineering, having been a student of it before he had joined the Rangers. The main span, which was about forty feet, depended upon those two central pillars. There was some lateral support, from the heavy horizontal beams which held the cross timbers and thick boards of the roadway, but the two posts were all-important, with any sort of load on the bridge.

Now he found the reason for the long delay before the wagons had ventured across. The wagonmen had felled half a dozen thick trees from along the river bank, had chopped them to the right lengths, and jammed them under the horizontal beams as extra support, lashing them to the main uprights.

Hatfield studied the spot, corrugations in his bronzed brow. There was a ford not far from the bridge, but while it was good enough for horses, big rocks had to be skirted and there was a steep rise to the other bank which might have bogged down a heavy wagon. Also, there was thick growth along both banks. Brush and trees fought here, for the better earth that the water had made. The growth extended for a hundred yards or more back from the river.

THINKING it all over, the Ranger went back to his friends. After a drink and rest they trailed after the enemy, and at sunset reached a rise overlooking Colt City. The wagons and hired gunmen had arrived and the settlement bustled with activity.

There was dread suspicion in the Ranger's alert mind as to what Doc Sayers was planning. He believed that now he knew what had been brought in those wagons, but he had to make certain of it. Dark fell, and oil-lamps flickered on in the town. Hatfield and his small party ate cold rations and drank water. He then left his men in charge of Vance Meekham and afoot, took a roundabout way to the outskirts of Colt City.

He saw armed men patrolling the streets. It would not be a simple matter to get near unobserved, and he did not want to let his foes know how close he was. Lying in a clump of mesquite, he chose a route by which he might approach, picking the shadows.

He made ready by removing his spurred boots, substituting moccasins carried in his pack. He bound his crisp black hair with his bandanna, and left his Stetson with his footgear. Dirt blacked his face and hands. Finally he made sure he had nothing in his pockets which might clink and betray him.

Doc Sayers was on guard, doubly so because of Hatfield's previous bold foray to the very heart of the enemy's organization. They were watching for him, for any other spies. Sentinels with double-barreled shotguns or carbines paced the perimeter of Colt City.

The Red Raven, Sayers' saloon, was of course the gathering place of the White Gentlemen and their allies, Jelliffe's fighters.

[*Turn page*]

Can't Keep Grandma In Her Chair

She's as Lively as a Youngster—Now her Backache is better

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(Adv.)

It was toward it that Hatfield was aiming, as he bellied carefully across open spaces between spots of cover.

A stunted tree, a clump of bush, a protruding rock, even the contour of a slight rise which cast a shadow, took the flattened Ranger toward his goal. Once he reached the outside line of buildings it was easier in some respects, but harder in others. He could now make use of the walls to hide but on the other hand the pacing sentries were not as easily detected as they had been against the lighted settlement. The moon was rising, too, adding its silver light to the glow.

Pushed against the base of a long carriage shed, on the dark side, Hatfield hugged the sandy dirt. He could hear sounds of wassail from the Red Raven, down the alley. A guard with a shotgun slowly passed in Tin Can Alley.

He made his next objective, picked before he had started his crawl.

Shouts, music, came louder from the main saloon. There were lights on in Doc Sayers' quarters at the rear, and in the big barn which belonged to the Red Raven, separated by the breadth of the alley and a fenced corral.

It took the Ranger nearly an hour to reach the back of the barn. He was on the side away from the lamplight and the moon, pressed flat to the earth. Now, through cracks in the perpendicular foot-wide boards forming the barn wall, he could hear talking inside.

"Good-by, Rebs!" That was Sheriff Fuller's voice, and the officer snickered.

"In forty-eight hours," said another boasting voice, one that was new to Hatfield, "I'll guarantee they'll be buzzard meat, Sayers."

"Sergeant, I hope yuh're right." That was Doc Sayers. "I've counted plenty on this, and we'll have Meekham and most of our enemies at the ranch for yuh."

"We'll drive 'em in, shore," promised Fuller.

They were all in high good humor. Glass clinked. They were passing around bottles.

"Will it be ready so we can start at sunset tomorrow, Sergeant?" insisted Sayers.

"Yes, sir. In the mornin' I'll show yuh what I can do, just to set yore mind at rest."

Hatfield, his suspicions burning and strengthened by what he could hear of their talk, knew now that he must make absolutely certain. He could see little through the crack where he was listening—only a stretch of the lighted interior, and a pair of boots that moved now and then.

Inching farther along, placing the men inside by the sound of their voices, he located another crack through which he could peek.

Doc Sayers stood there, a glass of whisky in one hand, his big figure facing toward the center of interest. Nip Fuller, gripping a half emptied bottle of liquor, and several of his lieutenants, with three or four men who were strangers to Hatfield, were staring gloatingly. The man wearing the forage cap, evidently the "Sergeant" to whom Sayers had spoken, was squatted down, at work under hanging oil-lamps.

"Thought so," came to the Ranger. "That's what it is, all right. It'll wipe 'em out—"

HE FROZE, face down, not daring to look up for fear his eyeballs might shine and give him away, as a sentry came to the back corner of the barn and paused there, leaning on his gun. He rolled himself a smoke, lighted it, then turned and paced back.

Inside, the men were talking again.

"Let's drink a toast, boys," cried Nip Fuller, raising his bottle. "Here's to the next Gov'nor of Texas, Doc Sayers!"

"Hear, hear!"

Since the sentinel had gone back to the alley, Hatfield again could look through the crack and see them. Doc Sayers was smiling broadly, much pleased at the toast, as they all drank heartily to his political fortunes.

"If the people choose me, I'll feel it my duty to run," he announced.

"Yuh're It, Doc!" declared the sergeant, pausing with wrench in hand, and drinking up.

Fuller, with drink making him merry and loosening his tongue, sang out:

"Here's one I made up for the occasion, boys! Listen!"

And he bawled:

> Here's to the death of the Rebels
> May they burn forevermore.
> And here's to Big Doc Sayers
> Who beat 'em to the draw'r!

"Why, that's danged good, Sheriff," cried an enthusiastic comrade, pounding Fuller on the back. "Yuh're a cussed poet, at that!"

"Seriously, boys," Sayers said, more soberly, with a biting venom in his deep voice, "it's mighty important to rid the country of these Rebs. They're scum. They've flouted our law, refused to submit to legal arrest by our duly elected and chosen officers. They ain't got a leg to stand on, and if they get hurt it's their own fault. I'm a mighty easy-goin' man as a rule, but Meekham and his gang are outlaws!"

CHAPTER XVII

At the Bridge

OTHER men were coming out from the saloon and entering the barn now to join the party and admire the sergeant's han-

diwork. In the bustle, the Ranger inched off, reached the adjoining barn, and reconnoitered. When the positions of the sentries permitted, he crept off up the line, staying behind the stables and sheds serving the building on Main Street.

He was grim. He had to think fast, in his attempt to counter Doc Sayers' vicious, killing moves which now he fully realized.

For a time he crouched in the black shadow cast by a stable. Inside he heard the thudding hoofs as horses moved in stalls. At last he had made a tentative plan, based on the information he had gained through his dangerous foray into Sayers' town.

There were plenty of woodsheds, some attached to the stables, others standing off by themselves, with split kindling or cordwood marking them clearly. He hunted through two before he found a sharp ax. Another one yielded a bucksaw, still another an ax.

It was hard to carry these tools without giving himself away, so he spent a full hour in getting out from the guarded settlement. Once he had reached the sorrel, though, it was easy. He tied the axes and saw so he could carry them without their clanking, and rode off quietly to rejoin his little band.

Vance Meekham, Cap's elder boy, was on guard, while the others slept in the mesquite on the hill. Vance whispered to the tall Ranger, his sharp eyes having recognized Hatfield as he came up.

"How is it, Ranger?"

"All right, Vance."

Hatfield dropped the sorrel's reins, having led Goldy the last fifty yards to the concealed camp.

"What they up to?" asked Vance.

"Celebratin' our funeral just now," replied the Ranger.

"Huh! Take more'n that crew to down us."

"They got some reinforcements and new weapons, Vance. Now listen. We got to work fast and hard to beat 'em or they'll have us all, savvy? I'm goin' to write yore dad a letter of instructions that I want yuh to take through tonight. Quicker he gets it the better. I'll keep the others with me to help."

Vance helped him cover his shoulders and head with a poncho, so that the Ranger might light a candle stub stuck on a flat stone and write his message to Cap Meekham. No light that might betray their presence to enemy eyes showed as he worked.

When he had the letter to Meekham ready, he folded it, and Vance buttoned it in his shirt pocket, saddled his long-legged black horse, and set out for the ranch. Tim Meekham took over the guard, and the Ranger turned in for a sleep.

At dawn when Hatfield rose, his friends were stirring. They had a cold snack, then the Ranger took his field-glasses, and trained them on Colt City.

He could see the plaza, the sprawling Red Raven, but only the roof of the large barn behind it, since the saloon cut off the view. But men were up and about, the enemy moving in their stronghold.

When the sun had lost its first red tinge, a bunch of them appeared. The sergeant was there, wearing his forage cap. He was leading horses attached to the carriage of the heavy object which Hatfield had watched them assembling the night before.

The Ranger silently passed the glasses to Tim Meekham. The young fellow focused them on the group now in the plaza outside the Red Raven.

"By Jupe!" he gasped. "They got a cannon!"

"It's a field mortar, boys, and a big one," Hatfield told them soberly. "I've seen 'em before, and recognized what this one was when I watched 'em assemblin' it in a barn in Colt City. The thing is no more'n three feet long, but it weighs over twelve hundred pounds, made of cast-iron gun metal like it is. And it's mounted on a carriage that weighs over nine hundred pounds its own self. That's why them sidewinders was so careful-like at the bridge last night. Scared all that weight would bog it down."

Tim let out a low whistle.

"Dad's told us a heap about them things," he said. "They used 'em in the War. They even had a song they sung when they went into action with 'em. I remember the words."

Grimly he repeated:

When banners are wavin'
And lances a-pushin',
When captains are shoutin',
And war hosses rushin';
When cannons are roarin',
And hot bullets flyin',
He that would honor win
Must not fear dyin'.

The Ranger nodded. "That goes for now too, Tim," he said tightly. "For if that thing ever gets into action here, it'll toss shells into yore stronghold from outside small-arms' range and blow the ranchhouse to smithereens."

"Let's see—let's see!" cried Marty, snatching the glasses from Tim.

THEY all had a look, shocked and fascinated. They saw that the sergeant, busily self-important and glorying in the limelight, had the heavy weapon hauled around so that it pointed across the river. On an eminence stood a broken-down cabin, evidently deserted.

Doc Sayers came out of the saloon to stand on the porch and see the fun. All the gang watched as the sergeant loaded, and finally fired the field mortar.

The heavy boom carried to the watching men on the hillside. Their eyes were on the cabin a quarter mile away across the creek. It rose into the air, disappearing in a cloud of red dust. When the dust settled, the cabin was no longer there.

The men in the plaza were dancing, slapping one another on the back, congratulating the sergeant.

"That was a lucky shot—a bull's-eye the first time," said the Ranger. "But after a couple of tries, that artilleryman could hit anything, boys."

"Why, they'll blow the house up and all of us with it!" cried Tim, his young face clouded. "And we'd never have a chance of fightin' back!"

"Yuh reckon they'd do it and kill the women and kids?" Marty asked blinking.

"Reckon they would," the Ranger nodded. "Doc Sayers is determined to finish you folks."

It was a stunning blow to the men with Hatfield. For not until now had they so much as guessed what he had suspected, even before he had seen the mortar the night before. The reinforcing of the bridge, the sergeant, and other pointers, had started him on the right track to discover what Sayers' secret weapon was.

"We better get back and warn the folks!" cried Tim excitedly. "We'll run 'em out and hide in the wheat! Better, we'll head for the Staked Plain and get into the caves there!"

Hatfield shrugged. "They could chase yuh, come up with yuh. You'd have to carry food and water and the children and women in wagons. And yuh'd be throwin' the wheat crop and all yore homes to Sayers. No, I got another idea."

"What's that?"

"I'll show yuh, soon as I check up on what they're goin' to do next."

He settled himself to watch the town, and after a time, a strong, reinforced flat wagon was pulled into the plaza. Thick planks were set in place, and by means of ropes, the mortar on its carriage was pulled up onto the wagon. The sergeant supervised the roping of the wheels, chocking them so the weapon could not roll off in transit. A canvas cover was fastened over the mortar, and then the thirsty crew retired to the Red Raven.

"C'mon, boys, saddle up," ordered Hatfield. "We got work to do."

Somehow, Tim and the other men took cheer and comfort in the Ranger's steady self-confidence and strength, as they tightened their cinches. The Ranger's rugged face, bronzed by the winds of Texas, was serene.

"We'll beat 'em yet, won't we, Jim?" said Tim.

The nod Hatfield gave strengthened them, as they mounted and rode away from sight of Sayers' stronghold. . . .

It was night again before the army of gunmen which Sayers had collected got on the move. Some rode beside the rumbling wagon carrying the heavy mortar, others were ahead of it, and a long line of riders brought up the rear as they traveled on through the night until they reached the bridge they had reinforced.

The advance guard of the white-clad horde moved slowly across the wooden bridge over the river, the moonlight gleaming on their twin-peaked hoods, their eyes visible through the black holes in the cloth. The capes covering the White Gentlemen's bodies were draped about them. As slowly as they were riding the wind did not belly the garments.

The hoofs rang hollowly on the cross-boards of the bridge. Nip Fuller turned to a comrade.

"We're makin' good time, Mac," he said. "We'll have her set up in position by dawn."

"Yeah, Nip. We'll blow them blasted Rebs where they belong. It's a swell idea—saves a lot of our boys from gettin' hurt. When the Rebs run out—what's left of 'em that is—we can pick 'em off like so many flushed prairie hens!"

"That's right. Doc Sayers savvies what he's doin' . . . Let's wait till the others come up."

PAUSING, they stared at the silver ribbon of the little river. The stream was low in the later summer but it was never dry, since it was fed by deep springs at its source far to the northwest. The moon was well up, and it had reached its full roundness.

The shadows cast by the belts of timber along the river were dense, and the bridge itself was outlined on the water and shores by its interference with the rays of light. There was a faint wind and myriad stars studded the pale sky, though many others were shut out by the moon's brilliance.

The thudding of hundreds of hoofs shook the road, echoed hollowly under the bridge. Dominating this was the creak of laden wheels as the long cart with the mortar fastened to its body approached.

"Mighty fine crew we got, Mac," Fuller said, a hint of pride in his voice. "They're more'n a match for them Rebs—and that cussed Ranger! Wonder where the spyin' sidewinder is now? I only hope the first shell from this mortar conks him square!"

"He shore had us fooled, though," said Mac. "And he must have downed Baldy, that hombre the boys say Jelliffe sent. Had Jelliffe's letter and everything. And what a nerve he had, showin' that star and makin' out he'd killed a Ranger for it and would arrest Meekham!"

Nip Fuller swore hotly. "He'll pay for it with his lyin' hide. Sayers figgered it out that he must've come from Austin, waylaid

this Baldy, and took his place. Toll or Meekham must have wired to the Rangers."

"Yuh don't reckon the Rangers can get here with enough force to hit us, Sheriff?" Mac asked nervously.

Fuller spat. "Shucks no! They ain't got many men. By the time they come, we'll have the Rebs downed and nothin' to worry about. Sayers is too slick for 'em. Once he's elected Gov'nor he'll fix the Rangers' hash!"

CHAPTER XVIII

Battle

VOICES carried clearly to Hatfield's ear, over the low purling of the water. He sat Goldy, whose unmoving body, held in position by Hatfield's touch, was concealed by the black brush growing at the edge of the river. Goldy was hock-deep in the water. Underfoot was packed sand that would hold his weight, for Hatfield had carefully checked all that.

His face blacked because of the moonlight, Hatfield sat his saddle easily. In one hand he held his lariat, forty feet of strong, supple rope with which he could do tricks that seemed magic to the uninitiated, but which were simply the result of much practise and the inborn skill of the Texan.

Beyond Hatfield, and also hidden from the bridge by screening brush, Tim Meekham and Marty stood at the heads of their mustangs, hand over the animal noses so that there would be no telltale whinnying.

The figures on the bridge stood out clearly against the sky.

"Here they come," said Sheriff Fuller. "Let's go!"

He led the advance party off the bridge, onto the dirt road which, after the fork was passed, led to the Meekham ranch.

Now the creaking wheels of the long wagon sounded loud. Bunches of riders, in white hoods and cloaks, pushed onto the bridge confidently, since it had already been tested by the sergeant in charge of the mortar when they had come in with the weapon.

Hatfield held his breath. Would the sergeant again halt, and check up? But he had counted on human nature. They had already reinforced the span, and the Ranger had been careful to leave no possible warning of any tampering with it.

A bunch of White Gentlemen crossed, the hoofs of their mounts ringing on the bridge.

Then the first pair of yoked, heavy-shouldered horses set foot on the south end of the main span, and the wheels creaked mightily on the upgrade as they bumped along.

Hatfield drew in a deep breath. There was a side railing made of wooden lengths, but it was flimsy, and only about three feet high. He could see the bent heads of the six horses, pulling the long, slow wagon onto the center of the span.

The lariat in the Ranger's skilled hand whirled about his bared head. It sang through the air like a striking snake, settled on the head of one of the lead horses, sliding to its neck and shoulders as the big officer jerked back on the sorrel, and Goldy, trained to such work, responded.

"Now!"

Hatfield shouted his signal to Tim Meekham and Marty, who had sprung to horse.

"Hey, what the—" The sergeant, at the reins of the yoked teams, cursed shrilly.

The startled lead horse, the rope tightened on his throat, was whipped violently around by Goldy's sudden pull. The animal reared, fighting the reins, yanking them out of the startled driver's clutch. The other horses followed the leader's turn.

And then, as Tim Meekham and Marty drove in their spurs and splashed full-tilt up the stream bed, the long ropes attached to that central upright on the Ranger's side tightened. They held, and the thick post which had been sawed almost all the way through, broke in half.

The mortar's great weight did the rest. The horses screamed as they plunged through the weak guard rail, and over into the water. The long wagon slid to the edge of the tipping boards, two wheels went over, and as the whole bridge sagged, groaning with earsplitting sounds, the mortar broke loose from its bindings and chocks and rolled off into the water.

The wagon, the sergeant, and several white-clad riders went with it, as the bridge tipped to almost right angles and splashed heavily in the bed of the stream.

Screams and curses rose as the great array of White Gentlemen saw the mess. The collapsed bridge checked those who were still on the south side, and Nip Fuller, hearing the noises, turned and raced his men back to stare with horror.

"Who done that?" shrieked the sheriff, jumped up and down in his saddle.

"Git me out of here, will yuh, cuss it?" sputtered the artillery sergeant, who had landed in the water.

The horses were kicking and lashing out dangerously. Several drenched White Gentlemen were picking themselves up, shocked by the fall from the tipped bridge.

SO STARTLED were they that they had hardly heard the short cry of the Ranger as he had set his plan in motion, one that he had rehearsed with the boys. They had sawed almost through the upright and weakened the auxiliary props, so that Tim and Marty could jerk them out with their horses. Hatfield had practised throwing his loop over

Tim's mustang as the mount stood on the bridge. Now he was reaping the reward for his clever thinking and strategy.

"Yip—yip-yippee!"

In the night, that shrill Rebel yell sent shivers up and down the spines of the White Gentlemen. Hands reached for pistols and carbines, ears were strained.

Hatfield had turned Goldy up the bank, and in the brush he hastily arrayed himself in a white cloak and hood he had brought along. Quickly he fastened a white ribbon about Goldy's arched neck, and rode through to the edge of the woods.

Cap Meekham was waiting for him there, with all the men they had dared bring from the ranch. They were his trusted friends and followers, fighting for their lives. Each one was garbed as a White Gentleman now.

Tim and Marty, having cast off the ropes by which they had dumped the bridge, came up and slipped on their own disguises which had been hastily fashioned by the women at Meekham's according to Hatfield's instruction in his letter to Cap.

"Make shore every one of us has a white ribbon on his hoss's neck," snapped the Ranger, as he took the lead. Don't want any mistakes—killin' one another."

"It's all took care of, Hatfield," said Cap Meekham. "Yore note give the orders and we carried 'em out."

"Bueno. Here we go, but keep quiet till we're among 'em."

Two thirds of the White Gentlemen were on the south bank, blocked by the broken bridge. They had pressed up into bunches to observe the wreck of the field mortar. Some had dismounted to give a hand to the sergeant and others who had fallen in the water.

And Jim Hatfield, in the white peaked hood and cloak, rode straight toward them, breaking out from the woods fifty yards below. At his back came Zeb Meekham, and the Texans.

"This is a purty mess, Sheriff," snarled a white-hooded rider as Hatfield came up behind him. He had mistaken the tall cloaked figure for that of Nip Fuller, figuring that the advance guard had come back across the stream to rejoin the main party.

Most of the hooded men had bunched up on the bank and were craning their necks to see the mortar and the big wagon lying there in the water.

"Cussed Rebs must have sawed the bridge supports," growled someone. "I heard 'em yellin'. We ought to catch 'em and give 'em what-for. Let's get on anyways and burn Meekham's!"

"Good idea!" shouted another. "Say, boys, what say we hit Meekham's and clean them skunks out?"

The Texans had come filtering up through the outskirts of the trees and, spreading, lined up behind the enemy forces. They wore peaked hoods and white garments, but each could identify the other by the broad white band fastened to the neck of every Texan's mustang.

"Sergeant Smoot—Sergeant Smoot!"

That was Nip Fuller, frantically calling to the artilleryman, who had managed to extricate himself from the wreckage. The sheriff appeared on the north bank. He dismounted and slid down to the water's edge, calling the sergeant.

"Yeah? What yuh want, Sheriff?"

"Any chance of gettin' that danged cannon out and goin' on tonight?" demanded Fuller.

"Shucks, no," replied Smoot. "Gun carriage is smashed, and the whole business is full of water, Sheriff. I think the sightin' gear's busted, too. It'll take a day to get it out and check up."

The ends of the half circle had closed in. Hatfield, at the center of his forces, saw they were in position. His powerful voice rang out in the Rebel yell, thrice repeated.

"Yip—yip—yip-ee-e-e!"

THE HIGH-pitched battle cry was blood-curdling. As he uttered it, Hatfield leveled his Colts, and started the golden gelding forward. Meekham and his boys drove their horses in, bumping and shoving, pushing the massed White Gentlemen to the brink of the stream. Riders in front, swearing at their crowding comrades, were sliding down the bank.

And at the Ranger's signal, figures sprang from the brush a few yards from the bridge, on the opposite side. They had cut big branches from pine trees, and these were quickly lighted.

Following instructions, according to Hatfield's plan of battle, the four on the north of the stream had poured coal-oil over the limbs. They blazed up swiftly, crackling high in the air and lighting the scene with a fierce yellow glow. Brush was thrown on, and the bonfires blazed.

Against this light, which blinded the White Gentlemen, the Ranger had his foes!

CHAPTER XIX

Carpet-Baggers Out

YELLING their shrill battle cry, the Texans drove the confused White Gentlemen into the dip formed by the river. A blast of guns, spitting Colts and carbines, sent lead whistling close over the killers.

Hatfield, in the front, could see Nip Fuller against the bonfire set on the road. The sheriff's face was stricken with stunned fear. He

was trying to see who had attacked, but could only make out that a line of white-clad horsemen had command of the south bank, while a churning mass of White Gentlemen fought and cursed in the river. None could tell at whom to fire, for the riders on the south bank were in white hoods and cloaks, and might be Sayers' cohorts.

The sheriff waded in, slipping on the rocks, seeking to restore order in the ranks. He was furious. Evidently he thought that some faction among his men was trying to jest with the rest by throwing a scare into them. He splashed over and came up the bank, swearing hotly.

"Yuh danged fools!" he screeched. "Cut it out! We got enough trouble without you jacks cuttin' capers!"

Hatfield reached down, and his steel fingers gripped the lanky officer's shoulder.

"Fuller, the party's over! I arrest yuh in the name of the State of Texas! I'm a Ranger!"

"The Rangers!" screeched Fuller.

"The Rangers!"

Those near had heard their leader, and the chilling word swiftly spread among the milling throng, framed in the light across the way.

From the brush, after they had started the bonfire, the picked Meekham men opened with blasting Colts. They shot high, but it gave the impression that the White Gentlemen were hemmed in.

Hatfield threw back the hood which had covered his head and shoulders, and Fuller, frozen by fear, recognized his stern features, reddened by the firelight.

"Hatfield! You—you—"

He choked on his own words, and the Ranger felt him shaking like a leaf. Hatfield rammed a Colt against the sheriff's nose.

In the stream bed, a couple of hotheads got guns into play. Bullets sought the tall man on the sorrel. For a moment it seemed that horrible slaughter, with both sides mixing it point-blank, would make the stream run red.

Meekham's men, down the line where the gunnies had fired, drove in, shooting at the flaring Colts of the enemy. The horsemen on the bank sent a crashing volley, bullets singing close over the hooded heads or spitting in the water.

"Tell yore men to surrender!" shouted the Ranger. "They're surrounded and it's death if they fight!"

Fuller was more than convinced as he felt the cold steel of the Ranger's Colt muzzle against his shrinking flesh.

"Throw down, White Gentlemen—throw down, boys!" he shrieked, as the firing permitted him. "The Rangers have got us! They're here! There's hundreds of 'em! Surrender!"

Many heard him and they drew down their guns. Only those off to the sides, with a chance to make it, sought escape by riding up the stream and cutting off into the woods. Some succeeded, but most of them were caught in the crush.

"Order 'em to take off their hoods and keep their paws up," prompted the Ranger, still holding the sheriff.

Fuller repeated his command. He was fascinated by the horror of his own plight, helpless in the Ranger's grip.

The hoods were coming off, and the white cloaks stretched as gunny hands were raised in token of surrender.

"Cap!" called the Ranger.

"Yes, suh!" Meekham was chortling with delight at the bold, sure tactics of the Ranger which had defeated an enemy three or four times the size of his forces.

"Get yore boys down and have 'em disarm the prisoners—pronto, now. We got to make time."

Picked men hurriedly dismounted and, snatching away shotguns, carbines and Colts, threw them up on the bank. Some of the hooded riders had almost managed to get clear, but now they were crushed, with all idea of attack driven from their stunned minds.

When the gunmen had lost their fangs, the Ranger again spoke to Meekham.

"Leave Addison in charge of the prisoners, Cap. I want you and Vance and Tim, and a couple other fast riders to come with me."

"Yuh're goin' after Sayers?"

THE DANCING, red firelight touched the rugged face of the big Ranger. It was chiseled from granite, set in a grim expression, and a shiver passed through men who saw him then, his eyes dark as an Arctic sea. It was a thrill of fear for those who deserved it, of admiration for the decent Texans he had come to save.

"I'm goin' after Sayers," replied Hatfield, his voice clipped.

He shook Nip Fuller, who shrank near him, afraid of Meekham and the avenging Texans. Cap Meekham, hood thrown off, had brought his horse closer.

"So, Fuller, the tables are turned," snarled Cap.

He slapped the sheriff in the face with the back of his heavy hand.

"Don't let him get me, Ranger!" quavered Fuller.

"Cap, this man's a Ranger prisoner," Hatfield said quietly. "That means he's got my protection, savvy?"

Meekham swore. His eyes were blazing in the excitement of victory.

"These fellers deserve nothin' but a hemp end, Ranger. They call us Rebels. Well, reckon we'll show 'em what it means."

"Yuh ain't Rebels now, Meekham—yuh're Texans. Yuh'll foller the laws of the land."

Meekham was silenced. Suddenly his teeth

showed in a grin. "That's right, boys. The Ranger speaks straight."

He turned, and gave Addison the orders of the big man on the sorrel.

"You come with me, Fuller," said Hatfield. "There's a good hoss for yuh. Get mounted."

Disarmed, Nip Fuller climbed shakily into the saddle. He rode in front, along the road to Colt City, with Hatfield, Meekham, his sons, Marty and two more of the Texans, pounding the dirt at his mustang's heels. . . .

Doc Sayers warned by swift riders who had managed to beat the Ranger and Meekham to Colt City, was in his office. There was a big revolver in his hand as he jumped to face the door which opened suddenly behind him as he stood in his suite at the rear of the Red Raven.

"So it's you, Fuller—yuh old buzzard of a fool!" Sayers snarled. "Yuh gummed up the works, I hear!"

Nip Fuller's craw jumped madly up and down, and his eyes bulged until they looked like marbles popping out of his head. He tried to speak, but only a bleat came from his trembling lips.

On the table stood a carpet-bag. It was made of blue-and-red material, and was large enough to hold a man's personal belongings.

"I come to Texas with that," growled Sayers, his defective eye blinking fast, "and I'm goin' out with it! Yuh're loco if yuh think yuh're goin' with me. Yuh've made yore bed—now lie in it."

Evidently Sayers thought that the sheriff had come to demand protection as they fled from Texas. Or perhaps a cut of the contents of the carpet-bag which, instead of clothing, contained money stolen from the oppressed people over whom Rudolph Sayers had held sway for years.

At last Fuller found his voice.

"Yuh—yuh better drop the gun and quit, Doc! We're ruined. The Rangers are here! That big hombre Hatfield was one, shore enough, and he's—"

"Shut up, yuh yellow dog, shut up!" Sayers shrieked. "I'll break Hatfield and every Ranger in Texas!"

Gun rising, he seized the leather handles of his carpet-bag and started determinedly for the door.

"Out of the way. I'm ridin'. They won't take me!"

"Reach high, Sayers! Texas won't stand for polecats like you!"

From the open window, the Ranger spoke. There was, to his mind, something familiar about the scene. Then he recalled how he had dreamed it at Meekham's one night, when he had in his fancy reached the point where he could arrest Doc Sayers.

But from now on, it differed.

Sayers, jumping six inches in his startled fury, whirled with a snarl, the carpet-bag in his left hand, the heavy Colt in the right. All the veneer had been rubbed from the politico, and he was an outlaw, bent on escape.

He pulled trigger, aiming at the head and shoulders of the Ranger framed in the window.

But his hand shook. His arms collapsed, the carpet-bag falling on one side, and then the revolver clanked on the other.

DOC SAYERS stood there, his arms down, an astonished expression on his face.

His heavy knees gave way and between his fierce eyes showed a blue spot, slowly reddening, the mark of the Ranger's blue-steel Colt. The big man fell, lifeless, across the gaudy-colored carpet-bag, symbol of his smashed power.

* * *

"And that's it, Cap'n McDowell," reported the Ranger, back at Austin headquarters.

"Bueno. Yuh say yuh got things in shape in the Panhandle?"

"Yessuh. The folks have got most of their wheat reaped and they're gettin' a high price for it, I understand—enough to set 'em all up. Toll's marryin' June Meekham. Sayers is dead, and a bunch of his gunmen are awaitin' trial. The White Gents are skunked."

"How about this Jelliffe, that sent aid to Sayers?"

Hatfield shrugged his wide shoulders.

"I made for Fort Brazos—that's where Sheriff Fuller said I'd find Jelliffe, who was another carpet-bagger like Sayers, only not so big and ambitious. 'Twasn't far off the home trail. I was sort of late, though. Hearin' by wire what'd happened at Colt City, the folks there had tarred and feathered Jelliffe and run him and his gang out of town for good."

McDowell's seamed face beamed. He rustled a sheaf of reports.

"I'm gettin' more and more of the same kind of reports from different communities," he said. "The people are takin' hold agin, and Texas will live."

Yes, thought the experienced old chief of Rangers, as long as Texas had men like Jim Hatfield, Texas would live, would fight the good fight and win.

But there was always unfinished business in the vast expanses of the Lone Star State.

And later, Hatfield rode again from headquarters, with McDowell waving to him from the doorway, as the tall officer on the golden sorrel carried Ranger justice to the far reaches of Texas.

■

Next Issue: Further exciting exploits of JIM HATFIELD *in* PIRATES ON HORSEBACK, *another full-length action novel by* JACKSON COLE

Kirby's old range six-shooter blazed

VOICE FROM BOOTHILL

By GUNNISON STEELE

Like a Message from His Murdered Brother Came the Voice that Warned Kirby Grant of a Killer's Trick!

IT WAS nearly sundown when freckled, redhaired young Kirby Grant saw the two riders slowly crossing the meadow below the Box A ranch house. His smoky-blue eyes narrowed instantly on the rear horse. The figure on this horse was sprawled face-down across the saddle, arms flapping grotesquely.

A cold feeling inside him, Kirby walked out to meet the rider who was leading the big roan. The rider was Shorty Kerns, a blocky, blunt-faced puncher who rode for a neighboring outfit. Kirby couldn't see the face of the man on the roan, but he already knew who it was: His older brother, Dave Grant.

He ran forward and started tugging at Dave's heavy body. Shorty jumped down and helped him.

"Easy, kid," Shorty said. "No hurry. Dave's . . . dead. Nick Baron killed him a little while ago."

They carried Dave Grant into the house. Blood covered the front of his shirt and he was, as Shorty had said, dead. The shock and grief of it held in check the flood-tides of Kirby's anger for several minutes. Then he turned and looked at Shorty Kerns, standing silently by.

"How did it happen?"

Shorty shuffled uneasily.

"Why, Dave drew on Nick Baron, and Baron shot him."

Kirby said coldly, "Shorty, you're a no-good liar! In the first place, Dave wouldn't have drawn first on any man—second, if he had the other man would be the one who was dead. You tell me what happened, and tell it straight!"

"What I said is the truth," Shorty insisted doggedly. "It happened over at Baron's shack. How come I was there, a coupla hours ago, while I was takin' a short-cut to the Wagonwheel, I met Dave over close to Duckbill Canyon. I could see he was mad clean through. He said he had proof Nick Baron'd butchered a Box A steer two days ago, and he was headed over there to talk to Baron. He asked me to tag along, as a sort of witness, and I did.

"I didn't crave to get mixed in any ruckus, though, so I stopped at the spring fifty yards from Baron's cabin and waited. Baron came out, and him and Dave talked mebby ten minutes. I couldn't hear what they said, but I could tell they were quarrelin'. Finally, Dave shook his fist in Baron's face, then turned and started walkin' toward where I

was holdin' the horses. He'd walked mebby thirty feet when he whirled, right quick, and grabbed out his gun."

"Nick Baron's gun was already out, wasn't it?"

"No, it wasn't. It was leathered."

"You mean to tell me Dave just stood there, gun in hand, and let Baron draw and kill him?"

"I dunno," Shorty said helplessly. "I just know what I saw. Dave drew first, then Baron drew and shot him, that's all I know. Except. . . ."

"Except what?" the redhead prodded, as Shorty paused.

"Why, Dave had his gun out, but he didn't seem to be lookin' at Nick Baron. There's an old shed a little to the right of where Dave stood, and he seemed to be lookin' at that shed. Mebby I'm wrong about that, though. It sounds crazy, don't it?"

TWENTY minutes later Kirby Grant saddled his buckskin and headed for the nearby town of China Springs. His first wild impulse had been to ride to Nick Baron's place and have a gun-blazing showdown with Baron. But he'd decided against it. Shorty Kerns was square—he hadn't lied about what happened, even if it didn't make sense.

Nick Baron had squatted on a few acres adjoining the Box A several years before. He was a surly, quarrelsome man who obviously had seen better days, but who now lived alone in his filthy shack and worked just enough to live. On several occasions he had been accused of thievery, and worse, but never convicted.

In China Springs, Kirby Grant saw the coroner and undertaker, then went to the office of Sheriff Sam Lager. Sheriff Lager, a heavy, square-faced man, listened solemnly to the news Kirby brought.

"You aim to arrest Nick Baron?" Kirby asked.

Lager spread thick hands.

"On what charge? If what Shorty Kerns says is true—and it'd stand in any court—Baron shot in self-defense after Dave had drawn. Couldn't convict him in a thousand years."

"Dave wouldn't have drawn his gun 'less he aimed to use it, you know that."

"Sounds crazy," the sheriff admitted. "But there's the evidence. Baron's a skunk. He ought to be back in the pen—"

"Back in the pen?"

"Why, yeah, Nick Baron served a term in the pen. For a killin', too. I've got his record. This killin' happened up in Silverpeak, while Baron was with a travelin' tent show. Self-defense that time, too, but he got ten years for it. After servin' three years he was turned loose. But the show wouldn't take him back, so he drifted in here and squatted in that old shack. He's a bad one, all right, and I wish I could jail him, but I couldn't make a murder charge stick. Kid, you ain't got any idea of takin' this fight up, have you?"

"I sure have," Kirby said grimly. "Dave was murdered, and Nick Baron's gonna pay for it!"

Red banners were streaming across the sky when Kirby Grant rode up and stopped before Nick Baron's shacklike ranch house two days later. The ranch house and sheds, in a sorry state of disrepair, were hemmed in by thickets and underbrush.

Kirby tied his buckskin to a sapling near a spring fifty yards from the cabin, and went forward afoot. When he halloed, Nick Baron came from the shack and stood just in front of the doorway. He was a dark, slablike man with shiny black eyes. He wore a silver-handled .45 tied to his thigh.

There was no warmth in Baron's eyes as he looked at Kirby.

"Off your range, ain't you, kid?"

"So was Dave, two days ago, when you killed him," Kirby said. "That's what I wanted to talk to you about."

"Now, look, kid." Baron shifted nervously. "You got no right to come houndin' me. I had to shoot Dave Grant, or let him kill me. He drew first."

"I heard that. But I ain't satisfied."

"You got no right to come here and pick a fight with me," Baron said, a little shrilly. "All I want is to be let alone. I ain't a gunman—I couldn't beat you on the draw, and I know it."

"Dave was faster than me. How come you beat him, then?"

"I dunno," Baron growled sullenly. "I was scared. When I saw him draw, I just grabbed my gun and fired. I was surprised—I expected him to kill me. I got proof I'm tellin' the truth—"

"Yeah, I know—Shorty Kerns saw it. But he was way over yonder at the spring. Dave accused you of stealin' a Box A steer, didn't he?"

"He was wrong. I never stole anything—"

"That's a filthy lie!" Kirby said bluntly. "You been thievin' ever since you've been here. You're a mangy, no-good skunk, Baron!"

NICK BARON'S eyes narrowed until they were pin-points of cold black hate. He slouched a little, his fingers spreading, a fierce lust to kill on his weasel face.

Kirby stood very still, watching Baron. Almost in this very position, he figured, Dave Grant and Baron had stood two days ago. To his right, fifty feet away, was the old tool shed Shorty had mentioned, its rotting door slightly ajar. Dave had died on the ground directly behind the spot where Kirby now stood.

Baron straightened and a mask of cunning hid what lay in his mind.

"You want to kill me," he whined. "You're

tryin' to make me draw. But I won't do it. I'm a peaceable, law-abidin' man. I'll go to the sheriff and demand protection—"

"Protection!" Kirby spat harshly. "What you need is a dose of hot lead. But since you ain't got the sand to draw like a man, I'll send you to the pen."

Baron licked his lips.

"You can't do that," he said huskily.

"Can't I? I've got the same proof Dave had that you've been stealin' Box A cattle. And I aim to use it. I'm headin' for town to tell the sheriff what I know, right now!"

Abruptly, he turned his back on Nick Baron and strode toward his buckskin at the spring. He'd taken no more than ten steps, when a voice said sharply:

"Over here, kid, in this shed—I aim to kill you!"

Kirby Grant leaped to one side, whirling in mid-air. That warning voice had come from the old shed. But he didn't even glance that way. From the tail of his eye he saw Nick Baron in a half-crouch, wicked fury in his black eyes, hand slashing downward for his gun.

Kirby's hand streaked down, and up, and his old range six-shooter blazed and roared. Baron's skinny body jerked convulsively, then his knees buckled and he slid to the ground, his unfired gun still in his hand, the stark surprise and terror he'd felt as he sensed the failure of his cunning trick still distorting his dark features.

Sheriff Sam Lager came lumbering around a corner of the shack, gun in hand.

"By gosh, kid, it worked!" he said excitedly, and barged on past and into the old tool shed. He came out a moment later, looking crest-fallen

"Nobody there," he said. "The skunk got away through the back door into the brush. By jacks, kid, you took a big chance, turnin' yore back on Baron like that."

Kirby shook his head.

"Not too big a chance. I knew he wouldn't shoot me in the back, any more than he had Dave, because that would be proof of murder. He aimed to shoot me from in front as I stood there with my attention on that shed, tryin' to locate the one who'd called out he aimed to kill me. He figured he'd have plenty of time—like he'd had with Dave—before I savvied there wasn't anybody in the shed!"

"Wasn't . . . what? I heard him holler out from the shed, that he aimed to salivate you!"

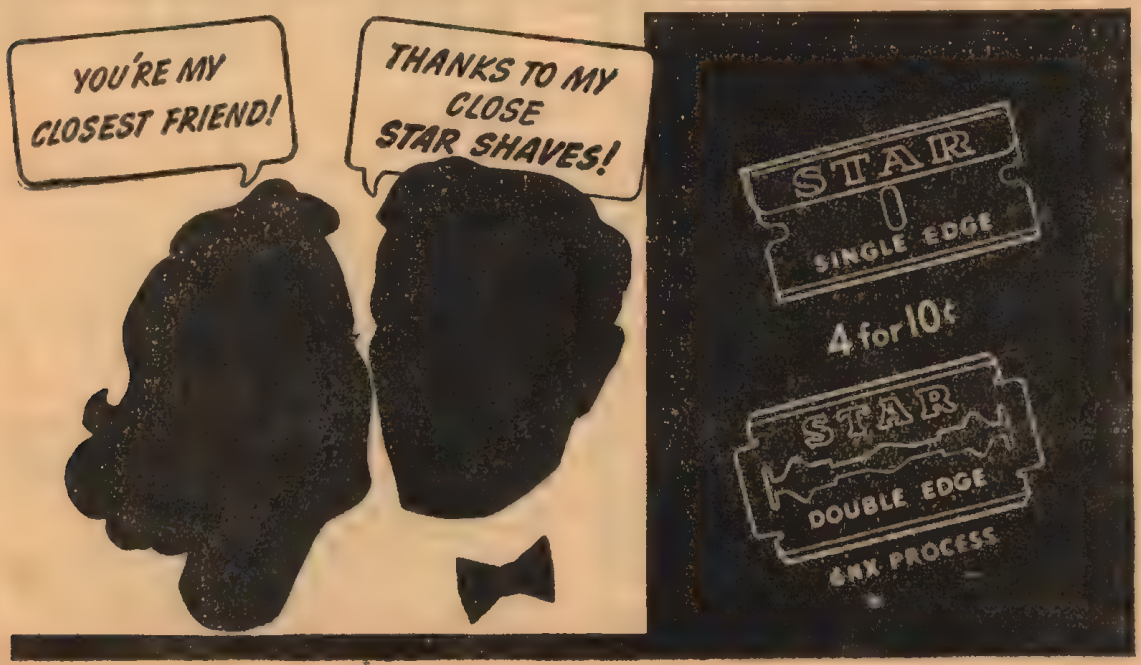
Kirby Grant shook his head again, grinning tautly.

"I figured out what happened, soon as I found out what Nick Baron did in that travelin' show he used to be with. A ventriloquist, with a dummy on his knee! Yeah, it was Baron's own voice in that shed!"

•

All's fair in war on outlaws, decides lawman Tom Darnack when he tries a new way of getting his man in* RANGER OUT OF BOUNDS, *a thrill-packed manhunt yarn by* JOHNSTON McCULLEY *coming next issue!

•



"There's nothing the matter with her—just scared," one of the men said harshly

SALVAGE OF THE BOX M

By J. R. JACKSON

Cherub and Joanie Michelson, Orphans, Sure Take on a Big Job When They Try to Squelch the Bully of Broken Horn!

FRECKLE-FACED little Joanie Michelson was talking a blue streak.

"First I get us a poker so we don't have to stir the fire with a stick of wood. Then I get some molasses and some corn meal and a side of bacon."

"Cherub" Michelson did not listen to his skinny little sister, riding in front of the saddle. He yanked the Spanish pony, Payaso, off to one side as three tough-looking, heavily armed men galloped past, hogging the entire road.

"Isn't that Mr. Mulligan?" Joanie shaded her eyes and squinted to make out the leader of the trio through the cloud of dust.

"Nobody else. Got as much respect for other people as a locoed mountain cat." The handsome youth raised a red kerchief and wiped his smooth, oval face.

Brother and sister watched the retreating riders for a moment. Resentful as he felt, Cherub could not help admiring the dashing figures they cut as they sped over the semi-arid New Mexican flat.

"He looks awfully fierce, Cherub," Joanie said. "You better give up the idea. I don't want you to get hurt and spoil your pretty looks, no matter how much we need money."

Cherub scowled at the twelve-year-old in the skimpy calico dress.

"If you call me 'pretty' again, I'll spank the daylights out of yuh. Anyway I made up my mind, and I don't call anything off. We ain't got much left except the Box M, and nobody's goin' to take it away if I can help it . . . There's the sheriff's office."

The two rode down the dusty white street of Broken Horn, almost deserted under the dazzling afternoon sun. Cherub checked Payaso in front of a dingy frame building with two barred front windows. "SHERIFF'S OFFICE," once painted in black letters across the front, had almost faded away.

Joanie skipped down and unfolded a flour sack she had brought to carry her purchases in. She started down the street to Slad Barker's Broken Horn Emporium, but Cherub called her back. He looked as stern as he could.

"Keep away from the Rio Grande Saloon," he ordered her. "Don't speak to strangers. If shootin' breaks out, run into the nearest buildin' and lie flat. I'll meet yuh here in an hour."

JOANIE nodded and ran off about her business, not a care on her little freckled face. Cherub watched her. Anxiety was in him because last week in a wild shooting fracas, two innocent townspeople had been wounded, one mortally.

Inside the office, Sheriff Lawton notched his spurs on the scarred table and, leaning back in his chair, slept the sleep of the old and the worn. His gray Stetson was pulled down over his eyes.

Cherub coughed discreetly, and the sheriff pushed his hat back and opened one eye.

"Howdy, Sheriff," said Cherub. "Can I jaw with yuh a spell?"

"Come in, Son. Rest yore bones. How's things at the Box M?"

Cherub took the other chair, resting his arms on the back and facing Lawton. He saw in the sheriff a square-built, grizzled old man who won a national reputation for courage in his youth. His fame kept him in office, though fading eyesight made him useless with a gun, and internal troubles made it hard for him to ride.

Business elements in Broken Horn donated money to pay a deputy sheriff who handled the dirty work in the perpetual warfare between the town and the Mulligan outfit, a powerful and mysterious syndicate dealing in shady cattle operations.

"Things happen fast at the Box M, Sheriff," Cherub said. "Banker Tad Breezel is foreclosin' if I don't make a payment on the mortgage. I ain't got the money. For myself I can get along, but it's goin' to be hard on my kid sister if I lose the spread."

A distressed look spread over the sheriff's leathery old face, and he scratched his head agitatedly, sending out a fine spray of dandruff.

"I've worried about you young 'uns ever since yore pa died and left yuh alone," he said. "Don't have to tell yuh how sorry I am. Worst year for cattlemen I ever saw."

"Sheriff, there's something yuh can do." Cherub leaned his fresh young face toward the lawman. "I hear Red Lawrence threw up the job of deputy."

"That's right. Pore feller was messed up somethin' awful." Lawton shook his head sadly. "Nobody blames him for turnin' in his badge. Some Mulligan skunks danged nigh killed him."

"Sorry about Red, Sheriff, but that's why I come to yuh. I want to be yore deputy."

The old lawman took down his boots and almost swallowed his "chaw" in his surprise.

"You plumb loco, Cherub? A boy like you wouldn't last long enough to get his badge polished."

"I thought it out," insisted Cherub. "I got good health, gun skill, no fear of work. I give yuh what yuh want, or yuh can take away the badge. With the job I can raise money on my wages and stall off the foreclosure."

Lawton still could hardly believe it.

"Well, if that ain't the beatin'est! Cherub, if I recruited a deputy in the county, yuh're about the last feller I'd pick. Yuh don't look like a lawman—yuh're too danged pretty, if yuh'll excuse my sayin' so. Yuh ain't cut out for law enforcement. Take my word for it."

Cherub stood up in his anger. "I respect yuh, Sheriff, but yuh're wrong. If Red Lawrence could do it, I can too. I think a lot of Red, but he's no better man than me."

"See what happened to Red." Lawton tried to sound kind. "We sent a boy to do a man's work. Red won't be right for months. He couldn't handle the tough hombres Mulligan's hired, and neither can you. Sad fact is, I don't know anybody locally can handle 'em, and this warrant ain't worth the paper it's writ on."

"Warrant for Mulligan?" Cherub stared at the folded paper.

"Issued meet and proper by the County Court, for all the good it'll do 'em."

"Give me that warrant, Sheriff." Cherub hardened his fresh young face. "If I don't bring Mulligan in, keep the job."

Lawton jammed the warrant inside his yellow leather vest.

"Get yoreself killed, son," he said, "but not on my say-so. I can't use yuh in no way. Don't pester me no more about it."

Cherub yanked his hat low over his flushed face and walked out. A denser man than he could have seen the sheriff was not going to budge. And in his heart Cherub knew the old man was partly right, knew his opinion would be approved by nine out of ten citizens in Broken Horn.

HE POUNDED across the white-dusty street to see Sarto Darling, the good-natured fat man who ran the Rio Grande. Sarto had been an old-time friend of his father and was counted as one of the respectable element, although the Mulligan crowd patronized his saloon.

Cherub pushed aside the warped batwings and found Sarto behind the bar polishing glassware. The fat man spotted his young friend and let out a grunt of pleasure.

"How're yuh, Cherub? How's Joanie? Been meanin' to ride out to the Box M for a visit, but you know how it is for a fat man to get around."

Cherub grinned. "Joanie's in town, Sarto. I'll bring her over to say hello."

"Don't do it, son." Sarto nodded vaguely down the bar. "Couple of Mulligan's boys here now. Trouble can break out any time. Guess yuh heard about the shootin' last week."

"I heard," Cherub nodded. "What chance has a new deputy got to get order in Broken Horn?"

The fat man laughed softly. "Don't joke, Cherub. One deputy's got as much chance as I have of outrunnin' Payaso back to the Box M."

"Must be some way to straighten things out," argued Cherub.

Sarto leaned closer. "One man's got no chance. I'm tryin' to raise money so's we can hire three or four. And we got to get some professional gun gents."

"I want a favor of yuh, Sarto," Cherub said slowly. "I got to raise two hundred dollars right away. I figger I can do it with a deputy's appointment. I want yore support."

Sarto Darling searched the handsome youth's face to find the point of the joke.

Automatically he raised a half-filled glass and threw down a couple of swallows.

"If that's a joke, Cherub," he said then, "I don't like it. If it ain't, run over and look at Red Lawrence. One of that cussed outfit smashed a whisky bottle clean across his face. Most horrible lookin' sight I ever seen."

Cherub shuddered. He knew what a fine-looking, carrot-headed fellow "Red" had been. He wondered how Red's young wife was taking it. But Cherub clamped his jaw hard and fixed his eyes on the saloonkeeper.

"I got to have that deputyship, Sarto. Joanie and me lose the Box M if I don't raise that two hundred. It's about my only chance, and I aim to take it."

Sarto shook his head until his drooping fat jowls quivered.

"Don't ask that," he begged. I couldn't sleep at night for worryin' if I did it. Yore old man was my best friend, and I know he'd have been dead set again it."

"Let me worry, Sarto," urged Cherub. "You just recommend."

"There's no use askin'." The fat face grew stern, then thoughtful at Cherub's downcast looks. "Tell yuh what. I'll try to raise the money for yuh. Take me two or three weeks."

"I only got one week." Cherub bit his lip. "Besides it ain't wise to borrow any more on the ranch. We're in too deep. Only thing can save us is for me to get a job."

The fat man polished a whisky glass angrily. He wrestled with his young friend's problem, moving his lips and twisting his big head around. Sarto, like other tradesmen, had been hit hard by depression in the cattle industry. Falling prices, drought, and scarcity of grass were administering the coup de grâce to many ranchers in Marrowspoint County.

"Times are just about the meanest since the panic of Seventy-two," mumbled Sarto bitterly.

Cherub spoke quietly. "If the bank takes the Box M, I'll send Joanie East. Don't know where I'll work, but I reckon that's the best thing."

Sarto looked appalled. "You two youngsters been almost inseparable," he insisted. "Why, the little thing's as devoted to yuh as an old hound dog."

"Some relatives of ours in the East wrote they was willing to take her," said Cherub. "Said they'd send her to school and learn her to be a lady."

"Little Joanie goin' East and learnin' all them dudish ways!" Sarto looked distressed. "A shame to spoil the pore little creature thataway. Such a fine little woman, doin' all the cookin' and cleanin' for yuh both at the Box M. Make some man a mighty fine wife one of these days."

"She ought to go to school," admitted Cherub, "but I hardly figgered on it bein' so far away."

THE men stiffened with alarm as a shrill scream rang out through the afternoon air of the drowsy town. Cherub recognized the voice.

"Joanie!" he cried, and tore out of the place.

In the middle of the wide street a little figure in a calico dress sprawled. Groceries and store purchases were scattered around.

A short way beyond three riders, who had just sent Joanie careening into the dirt, were slithering to a stiff-legged halt. Townspeople began to pop into view.

An angry cry escaped Cherub. He raced over to his sister, lifted her small body in his arms and spoke tenderly, begging her to speak. Joanie opened her eyes, reflecting daze and shock. She began to speak, hysterically.

"Three men on horses knocked me down, Cherub! I tried to get out of the way,

honest, but they came too fast."

Someone strode up behind them and spoke loudly, harshly.

"There's nothin' the matter with her—just scared. Keep the brat off the street if she ain't got sense enough not to run in front of people."

Cherub swung around and confronted a swarthy, brutal-looking man built like a barrel, with legs apart, arms on hips. His heavy mouth twisted in irritation as he looked at brother and sister. A small knot of townspeople gathered.

Cherub's face went prickly red. "Second time today you almost rode us down!" he said defiantly. "Remember, Mulligan, other people have rights on this street too. You ride through town like you own the place."

Mulligan's jaw clamped shut hard. "Don't tell me how to ride, pretty 'un. I don't take jawin' from men—and hardly ever from girls."

Mulligan's cohorts pushed up and laughed loudly at this sally. A few townspeople snickered. The insult turned Cherub dead-white.

"Take that back!" he shouted.

"Oh, dear, must I?" Mulligan simpered. "What yuh think of that? This pretty thing is goin' to make me take back what I said."

The three outlaws roared with laughter, slapping their thighs and squirting tobacco juice into the dust in their hilarity. Sarto ran out of the Rio Grande, yanking off his apron. Cherub turned Joanie over to the fat man and faced squarely up to Mulligan.

"Take back what yuh said!" he demanded tightly.

His tone instantly sobered Mulligan, and sent his hand scratching to his side. He swept Cherub's figure, and the hand paused as he saw that the youth did not carry a gun. He could not draw on a defenseless man in front of a crowd—not that he had any feeling against it.

Cherub made his voice hard. "I'm waitin' for an apology."

Mulligan dropped his hand.

"Yuh'll get six feet in Boot Hill," he snarled. "I can't shoot yuh now, but pack a gun. Next time I'll make an angel out of yuh."

Cherub knew the threat was not an idle one. Next time they met he could expect Mulligan to draw and fire, whether he, Cherub, was armed or not. The warning had been given. Such was the code duello of Mulligan's kind.

The swarthy man swung his barrel-like body and signaled to his men. The crowd fell apart for them.

Cherub thought fast. His decision was a quick one.

"I asked you to apologize," he barked at the retreating gunman. "Take off that gun and I'll show yuh, yuh dirty, yellow skunk."

As Mulligan yanked off a filthy leather vest and battered black sombrero, the late sun reddened his features to an expression of evil incarnate. Out of keeping were his raised bushy eyebrows showing surprise. Mulligan was not used to being challenged.

Cherub tossed his straw to the anxious Sarto and squared off. As he waited he scarcely breathed. The crowd fell silent, eyes on the slender youth in the faded blue levis.

A muted cheer sounded as Mulligan spit out a foul oath and fell on his opponent, hairy arms flailing like a windmill. The cruel blows hammered viciously over Cherub's body.

Grunting from pain and shock, the youth broke crazily away from him. One cheek was carmine red, and blood trickled down his chin from a cut lip. The sight of blood sent roars from the watchers. Mulligan bared his fangs and charged brutally, head lowered, intent on the kill.

CHERUB met the attack head-on and cautiously blocked the heavy blows. He sent one, two, three quick stabs into the dark, warped face. His fists stung as they crunched into the wiry stubble. Then the other man was down.

Cherub shouted with surprise as his jabs slammed Mulligan over on his back, his spurs whirring under the impact. The stunning thud knocked out his breath in a high moan. The crowd seemed as dazed as Mulligan.

Mulligan got to his knees and shook his head. Biting his lip savagely, he sprang suddenly at the youth, with a maniac's fury. Cherub elected to take him head-on.

Standing toe to toe, they slammed hard, vicious blows to body and face. The dull, pounding noise of their fists beat a primitive tattoo of accompaniment. Their bodies could not long absorb the thudding shock of it. One must go down.

Slowly, almost imperceptibly at first, Cherub gave ground. The brutal blows of his heavier opponent punished him unmercifully. A great cloud of fatigue and oblivion crowded down on his weary brain.

Mulligan roared and flailed away as the yells of the crowd told him he was winning. Without warning, Cherub dropped his arms and suffered a spasm of choking. He began to double at the middle, then fell clumsily into the dust. His legs curled up.

He rolled over on his back in an agony of pain. His eyes flicked open to see Mulligan's boots describing the horrible arc of a kick to his head. All went dark. . . .

Cherub opened his eyes. He was tucked naked between cool clean sheets His body pained steadily and back in his skull throbbed a dull headache. Mrs. Darling, Sarto's plump wife, leaned over the bed.

"How do you feel, Cherub?" she asked.

"I don't know." He found it hard to speak. "Who stopped the fight? I can't remember the end."

Sarto and Joanie were beside the bed grinning at him. Sarto held up Joanie's hand.

"Winner and new champeen—Joanie Michelson!" he exclaimed. "Show Cherub yore muscle, honey."

Cherub tried to sit up. "What yuh talkin' about?"

"Lie down there, boy." Sarto was firm. "Yuh can thank yore sister for you bein' here in one piece, even though kind of battered."

Cherub closed his eyes. The strain of trying to understand was too much for him.

"When Mulligan kicked yuh," Sarto continued, "some of us in the crowd tried to halt him. His two gunnies got in the way and we couldn't reach him."

"So I remembered the poker I bought!" cried Joanie. "I grabbed it up and whanged him over the head hard as I could. Oh, Cherub, I'm scared I ruined the poker. It's bent almost double."

"Never mind the poker," interrupted Sarto. "I'll buy yuh a new one. Well, sir, that crack over the noggin took all the fight out of the sidewinder. And it didn't take long for the rest of us to send his pards packin'."

Cherub stared at the fat man and his little sister.

"I'll be hanged," was all he could say.

"So the sheriff come up," Joanie went on, "and when he saw Mr. Mulligan, he pulled out a piece of paper and began to read—all about disturbin' the peace and no visible means of support and lots of other funny things."

The fat man chuckled. "Yes, sir, Sheriff Lawton and the rest of us carried Mulligan to the jail and threw his pants in the cell. One of the prettiest sights I ever seen."

"And Cherub," Joanie said eagerly, "the sheriff said to come see him when you feel better. Said somethin' about misjudgin' you and how you'd make a pretty good deputy."

Cherub puckered his bruised lips. "I'll be hornswoggled. Looks like I missed the best part."

"Shore did, boy!" exclaimed the fat man. "Banker Breezel come by a while ago. Said to thank yuh in the name of the bank for yore help in gettin' Mulligan arrested, and not to worry about a little time on the mortgage."

Mrs. Darling came in with a bowl of soup. She propped Cherub up and ordered him to eat. He found it painful to open his jaw, and some of his teeth seemed to be missing. The soup tasted good.

Joanie snuggled up against him. "You don't look as pretty as you did, Cherub, but I love you still. Are you goin' to be a deputy sheriff?"

Cherub winked at Sarto. "I reckon so. Though it beats me why you don't take the job, Joanie."

JIM HATFIELD PITS HIMSELF AGAINST THE EVIL HENCHMEN OF RED DOG INCE, TYRANT OF THE NUECES VALLEY, IN

PIRATES ON HORSEBACK

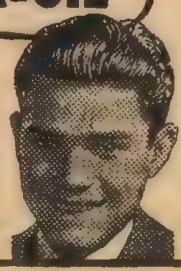
NEXT ISSUE'S SMASHING FULL-LENGTH NOVEL

CAN YOUR SCALP PASS THE *F-N TEST?

*The Famous Finger Nail Test

1 "It's F-N, the test for men!" Scratch your head—if you find dryness or loose dandruff you need Wildroot Cream-Oil. Buy the large economy size.

YOUR HAIR CAN LOOK LIKE THIS WITH NEW WILDROOT CREAM-OIL



2 Only a little Wildroot Cream-Oil can do a big job for your hair. Keeps your hair well groomed all day long without a trace of that greasy, plastered down look! Your hair looks good and feels good too!

NON-ALCOHOLIC CONTAINS REFINED LANOLIN!

3 Refined LANOLIN is a soothing oil that closely resembles the oil of the human skin. Get Wildroot Cream-Oil from your barber or druggist.

It was a fierce battle waged there in the middle of Beaver Creek

A PARD FOR PEDRO

By CLIFF WALTERS

Wandering Pedro Trujillo Finally Finds a Home—and a Chance for a Showdown With the Killer of His Uncle Juan!

BECAUSE his plump, kindly Uncle Juan was something of a gypsy as well as a sheepherder, young Pedro Trujillo had migrated from one sheep range to another. And, eventually, from New Mexico to Wyoming. But if life had denied this slim, thirteen-year-old youth a permanent home and regular schooling, it had not denied him happiness.

He was particularly happy today as, a willow fishing pole in his brown hand, he stood on the bank of North Fork and lured one speckled trout after another from the stream which tumbled, clear and cold, over the big boulders. Never had Pedro found such fishing as this mountain valley afforded. Excitement was like a fever gripping the dark-eyed youth as, a dozen small trout already dangling on their willow stringer, he hurried upstream.

He fought his way through a clump of willows and stopped suddenly as he came upon a camp, a tent and wagon. A hobbled team was grazing nearby. But it was the sight of another fisherman that stopped Pedro dead in his tracks, a fisherman who held in his hand a light rod no longer than a buggy whip. Attached to the butt of that flexible rod was a silver ornament which, working like a miniature windlass as the line wrapped

around it, made a strange, clicking sound, not unlike the sound made by yellow-winged grasshoppers flying above the sagebrush.

Fascinated by the first reel he had ever seen, Pedro stood spellbound—until, above the sound of the stream and the tinkling of sheep bells on the ridge south of the creek, he heard a voice behind him say:

"Deener time, Pedro. We go to camp now."

Quickly Pedro turned and exhibited his catch.

"Look, Tio Juan!" he said proudly. "What a feast we'll have! And this afternoon I'll come back again."

"But not to feesh in another man's camp, I hope," said Juan Trujillo, who had always spoken English to his nephew. "You like Wyoming, eh?" The plump old Mexican smiled.

"Always I'll stay here!" Pedro declared, following his uncle away from the creek and up the steep, sage-clad hill to the south.

WHILE Pedro babbled on enthusiastically, old Juan puffed his leisurely way along. They crossed the ridge, came to a sheep wagon set not far from a clump of timber. Standing by that wagon was big, red-faced Nick Cassideen, the sheepman for whom old Juan had herded for nearly six months now. Cassideen's slate-gray eyes were narrowed, his voice harshly belligerent as he said:

"That's a Mexican herder for yuh! If they ain't takin' a siesta in camp, they're off fishin'—and while their sheep scatter all over everywhere!"

"No, Meester Cassideen," old Juan protested quickly. "All morning long I have hunted for meesing sheep. Only an hour ago did I go down to the creek to get Pedro."

"Did yuh find them missin' sheep? I've been countin' up. It looks to me like yuh're short about a hundred head."

"Maybe. But in the fog and the rain yesterday, it was hard to see. The dog left me and—"

"Get yore duds, take that no-good kid and get out! Yuh're fired!"

"But first, my money," Juan said. "Six months pay."

"Losin'—or lettin' somebody steal a hundred head of sheep—and then havin' the gall to ask me for money!" Wrathfully Nick Cassideen moved forward and smashed a hard blow to the elderly Mexican's face.

Juan Trujillo reeled, struggled hard to keep from going down. Cassideen hit him again, a terrific blow that sent him crashing down against the wagon tongue.

Terrified, Pedro yelled. Cassideen whirled around, intercepted the lad who was trying to get to the nearby woodpile and grab up a pine club.

"Yuh try that," Cassideen rumbled, "and I'll—"

His big hand dropped to the gun slung at his hip. Then he whirled, grabbed up the fallen herder and smashed him down, head-first, upon the wagon tongue again.

The sound jarred against Pedro's fast-beating heart. He knew that his uncle couldn't survive such punishment as this big red-faced madman was meting out in his fury. Tio Juan was limp, beyond help.

Pedro fled toward the nearby clump of timber. He was running for his life, zigzagging through the sagebrush—and with bullets from Nick Cassideen's gun whizzing past him.

One of those bullets grazed the lad's right arm just below the shoulder. Blood trickled. Pedro sped on, his scuffed boots—a birthday present from Tio Juan—fairly flying. The youth glanced back and saw Cassideen. The man was thumbing more shells into his six-shooter and also running toward the timber.

Pedro hurdled a fallen log and plunged into the shadowed timber. He struck a dim trail, but had gone only a few yards along it when a strong arm darted out from behind a tree, seized the frightened lad, and halted him. He was trying to cry out again, but a big hand clamped over his quivering mouth and stifled the cry.

"Quiet, boy!" said the tall, broad-shouldered man who had halted the flight. "Stand behind that next tree and don't make a sound—please." The voice was reassuring.

Pedro looked up into the face of man he had seen once before, down in the little foothills town of Broken Rock. A face with a square jaw and lighted by a pair of clear blue eyes, very blue eyes, which were blazing now. This man was Bill Lanning. He owned the saddle shop where Pedro and his uncle had once stopped to buy the neatly-carved belt which Pedro wore.

Heavy boots clumped toward them and entered the patch of timber. Nick Cassideen was breathing heavily.

"I'll catch up with yuh, yuh Mexican coyote!" he yelled. "Yuh won't get away to blab about the killin' of—"

Tall Bill Lanning suddenly leaped from behind the tree which hid him from the trail. Pedro heard the jarring collision of bodies, heard an oath break from the thick lips of Cassideen who was trying to use his gun.

He didn't get the chance. Bill Lanning smashed a blow to Cassideen's face; another to the body; two more to the face—and Cassideen, dispossessed of his gun, was reeling groggily, jarring against the trunk of a pine tree. The saddle-maker hit him again and he went down so hard he slid along the carpet of dead pine needles.

PEDRO leaped upon the fallen six-shooter, then whirled to face Cassideen.

"No, lad," Bill Lanning said quietly. "No!"

"He killed my uncle!" Pedro cried, and

not tears rolled down his cheeks. "I'll kill him!"

But Pedro didn't pull the trigger of that weapon. He surrendered it to the strapping, gentle-voiced man whose hair was the color of buckskin.

Bill Lanning tied Cassideen's hands behind his back. When able to walk, the prisoner was marched down to the camp on North Fork, down to the wagon belonging to Bill Lanning who had brought his cousin from the East—Dave Lanning—up to the mountains on a fishing and hunting trip.

That afternoon, while they buried old Juan Trujillo, Bill Lanning said to a broken-hearted youth:

"Don't cry, Pete. There's plenty of grub down at my cabin in Broken Rock. Yuh can be my pard. That is, if yuh'll promise to keep us in fish. There's plenty of fish in Trout Crick, too, down there. And Dave says he's goin' to give yuh his fishin' rod, his new reel, and all the tackle yuh can use."

Miserable as Pedro was in this hour of grief, he found comfort in the strong but gentle hand laid upon his shoulder. . . .

Gratefully Pedro accepted the friendship and food of Bill Lanning, saddle-maker. And the people of Broken Rock were kind to the olive-skinned lad upon whom tragedy had struck. The lad stayed close to Bill who worked most of the day in the old, false-fronted saddle shop facing on the little town's only street. Pedro liked to watch Bill's big, capable hands work with leather.

It was not long before Pedro himself, with hammer and dye, was stamping designs in belts, bridle headstalls and spur straps. And doing it carefully and well.

"You like leather, don't yuh, Pete?" Bill said to him one day.

"I always have," the youth answered. "So did Tio Juan. He taught me how to braid quirts."

"Why don't yuh go fishin' tomorrow, pard, and catch us a mess of trout?" Bill asked, smiling. "Use that new pole and reel that Dave gave yuh, 'fore he left?"

"I'd rather help you," Pedro answered.

He seemed afraid to leave Bill during those first few days. He kept close to the saddle-maker, followed him whever he went.

One day Pedro followed Bill Lanning into the courtroom over at the county seat—Redville. Pedro's dark eyes flashed with hostility when they brought big, sullen Nick Cassideen into that crowded room. They put Bill Lanning on the witness stand, asked him questions.

Straightforwardly he answered those questions. Yes, he had seen Nick Cassideen kill a Mexican sheepherder by crushing his skull against a wagon tongue. And he knew why Cassideen had done it.

"Why?" asked Cassideen's sharp-eyed attorney sarcastically. "Maybe you can give us a motive for this so-called murder, Mr. Lanning?"

"If yuh'll let me tell yuh what happened, and as it happened, I will," Bill volunteered.

"Go ahead," said the elderly judge.

"I was huntin' grouse on the mountain slope between Cassideen's two camps," Bill said, "the day—a rainy day—before Juan Trujillo was killed. I plainly saw Cassideen movin' a little bunch of sheep from Trujillo's bunch over to the bunch herded by Chris Rillard."

"For what purpose?" cut in the defense attorney.

"Evidently for an excuse to kill Trujillo," Bill replied promptly, evenly. "Cassideen's been about to lose the sheep outfit he inherited all durin' the last year. He didn't want to dig up six months' wages for Trujillo. Mebbe he couldn't. So he killed the sheepherder, and before I could get through a certain patch of timber to stop him. And he'd have killed Pedro there to keep the boy from talkin'—if he could've shot straight enough with his six-shooter."

Pedro corroborated that testimony when, dark eyes smoldering at the prisoner, he was placed on the stand.

"I would have killed Cassideen if Bill hadn't stopped me," he concluded. "He is not fit to live among honest people. He should be crawling with the snakes, or living in a den with the cowardly coyotes that—"

"I object!" bellowed Cassideen's attorney.

THE sheriff was next placed on the stand. He substantiated Bill Lanning's testimony by saying that he had found the "lost" hundred head of sheep in the band herded by Chris Rillard, a man of little repute. Those sheep had been identified by their brands, which were of red paint, while the band herded by Rillard had been branded with black paint.

Then Rillard had admitted, when pinned down by the county attorney, that Cassideen had framed Juan Trujillo. The county attorney turned to the jury.

"So Cassideen," he said, "in trying to hang onto an inheritance which he had jeopardized with his wild drinking and gambling, held human life to be of less value than six months' wages for an honest old sheepherder. The nephew of the deceased herder is right. Cassideen should be crawling with the snakes!"

"Send him to the pen!" Cassideen bellowed, his voice drowning the warning of the judge. "I'll show double-crossin' Chris Rillard and Bill Lanning and a cussed Mexican kid that a rattlesnake can bite—if I ever get out of that pen!"

Cassideen drew a life sentence.

Enroute back to Broken Rock in the old buckboard pulled by Bill's team, Pedro turned to the driver.

HANDKERCHIEF TEST

PROVES VITAL ZONE SPOTLESS AND FREE FROM "GOO"—*no matter how often you smoke it!*

WDC

HESSON GUARD MILANO

RATIONED MOTORISTS

Now Get *EXTRA* GASOLINE MILEAGE

Now you can get up to 30% extra gasoline mileage with a Vacu-matic on your car. Quicker pick-up, smoother running, added power and precious gasoline savings guaranteed.

Automatic Supercharge Principle

Vacu-matic is *entirely different!* Operates on the Supercharge principle. Saves gas. Automatically provides a better gas mixture. Guaranteed to give up to 30% extra gas mileage, more power and better performance.

FITS ALL CARS

Constructed of six parts, fused into a single unit. Adjusted and *sealed at the factory.* Very quickly installed by anyone.

AGENTS TRIAL OFFER

Every car, truck, tractor a prospect. Send name, address on postcard for big money making offer and how you get yours for introducing.

Vacu-matic Co., 7617-1172 W. State St., Wauwatosa 13, Wis.

"They should have hanged Cassideen, Bill."

"I'd rather be killed than have to spend the rest of my life behind bars," said the saddlemaker.

"Maybe so," said Pedro. "But if you had not been in the mountains that day, there would have been no jail bars for Cassideen. Only, perhaps, death for me." There was gratitude, doglike devotion in the dark eyes that looked at Bill Lanning. "For your sake, I hope Cassideen never, never gets away from those bars."

"It ain't likely he will, pard. . . . Say, since tomorrow's Sunday, how about us goin' fishin' up Trout Crick? Yuh know, there's somethin' about the music of a stream that's kind of healin' to the heart. Mebbe it's make us forget about courtrooms and things like that."

Pedro nodded his dark head. "Yes. I remember the music of guitars when I was very small. And the music of sheep bells that used to put me to sleep when I first started traveling with Tio Juan. But never music quite so sweet as the song of a stream."

"It's even sweeter" — Bill smiled — "if there's trout in the stream, eh Pete?"

Pete smiled shyly. Dust funneled up from the wheels of the old buckboard and floated away across the Wyoming hills.

Ahead lay the foothills of the Big Horns, the little settlement of Broken Rock. Pedro was eager to get back to the two-roomed cabin there. Already it had become home to him. But he must prove himself worthy of that home, of Bill's generosity. He must help Bill in the saddle shop. Tio Juan had once said, "It matters not how hungry you are, muchacho. Food tastes better when it is earned."

Tomorrow, however, there would be fishing. And Pedro who had been practising secretly with the fly rod an Easterner had given him, would show Bill that he could handle that rod, that he could stand twenty feet away from an old bucket and, using the motion Dave Lanning had taught him, whip a light fly into that container almost every time. . . .

When September came, when the highest peaks of the Big Horns were swathed in the silver smoke of Indian summer, Pedro went to school. He didn't want to go. He couldn't read or write. But Bill wanted him to learn.

If it was embarrassing at first, that embarrassment soon passed. Pedro soon forged ahead of his younger classmates. Within three years he was in the eighth grade. Then school was over for Pedro. He worked in the saddle shop, and until he could do anything that Bill could in that shop.

One day—Pedro was twenty-one now—Bill said:

"We're gettin' ahead of our trade, Pete. And in spite of the fact that our trade's

picked up a lot in the last seven years. Why don't yuh hitch up the old team and take a trip up to the Beaver Crick beaver dams? There's some big trout up there. If anybody can catch 'em, you can, the way yuh can handle a fancy fishin' outfit."

"Why should I go fishing while you work?" Pedro asked.

"Because I owe you too much money now," Bill grinned.

"You owe me nothing, Bill. I owe you a great deal. You've taught me a good trade, you've let me go to school and you've—"

"Just the same, Pete, we're goin' to dig out the old money can some day and yuh're goin' to take part of that money. The last time I was over Redville for a load of freight, I saw that cute little girl that went through the eighth grade with yuh, Pete. Tonia—you know her name. Her dad herded sheep for old man Larrabee."

"Tonia Ramirez," Pedro said, a bit embarrassed.

"That's her. She's pretty as a picture now, Pete. And she was wonderin' why yuh never came over to Redville to see her."

PEDRO nodded, and shuffled his feet.

"Some day, maybe I will go."

"As soon as yuh get back from yore fishin'," Bill said, grinning. "And when yuh do

[*Turn page*]

Approved by Parents and Teachers

NOW ON SALE 10c AT ALL STANDS

BE PREPARED FOR
SICKNESS or ACCIDENT
THIS HOSPITALIZATION PLAN
PROTECTS YOU AND YOUR FAMILY
Costs only 3c
A DAY • EACH ADULT
1½c A DAY • EACH CHILD

FOR SICKNESS OR ACCIDENT
Hospital Expenses paid, up to . . . $540.00
(beginning with the first day)

FOR ACCIDENT
Doctor Expense paid, up to . . . $135.00
Loss of Wages reimbursed, up to . . $300.00
Loss of Life by Accident $1000.00

WAR COVERAGE AND EXTRA BENEFITS
Childbirth Expenses paid, up to . . . $60.00

● It's easy to run into debt when sickness or accident hit. Under the Family Mutual Plan, you'll be able to pay your hospital bill. And in case of accident, your doctor expenses, and you'll be reimbursed for loss of time from work. You can enter any hospital in the United States or Canada. In the hospital you may have the care of your family doctor. Simply present your Family Mutual card at the time of admittance. Benefits applying to children are 50% of those paid adults.

MAIL COUPON TODAY • No Agent Will Bother You

FAMILY MUTUAL LIFE INS. CO. WILMINGTON, DEL.

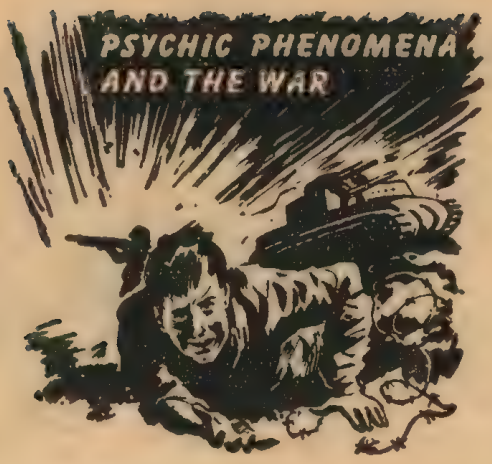
Family Mutual Life Insurance Co.
Wilmington 99, Del. 2-TC

Please send me, without obligation, complete information on your Economical Hospitalization Plan.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ STATE_____



On the Threshold of Danger

Strange Things Happen!

HAVE YOU ever sensed the imminent danger of a loved one—even though he is across the sea or continent? Have you been suddenly awakened by the call of your name—*then realize* that the one who spoke it was thousands of miles distant? If you ever had these experiences—as millions now have; learn the truth about them.

Love and *friendship* create a bond of consciousness between humans. This consciousness can be extended to bridge the voids of time and space. When human souls are bared under great *emotional stress*, then this *indwelling faculty* is released. Learn that there is far more to life, to the fullness and glory of living than you suspect.

Accept This FREE Book

Let the ROSICRUCIANS (not a religion), a worldwide organization of thinking men and women, show you that material limitations need not actually separate you from those you love. Convert the mysteries of your being into intelligible, usable laws of accomplishment. Write today for *free copy* of the book *The Mastery of Life*. It will explain how you may share these startling truths of self.

Address Scribe: M.L.B.

The Rosicrucians

SAN JOSE (AMORC) CALIF.

MAGIC LIQUID

Prints Photos

On Wood, Leather, Cloth, Cards Letterheads or almost any surface. Use any snapshot or other negative. Make hundreds of prints without harming negative. Won't wash off. Easy to use. Complete kit for 100 or more photos now only $1.00 postpaid, or $1.25 C.O.D. (Canada $1.50 money order only; no C.O.D.'s). Satisfaction positively guaranteed. Rush order today for the original, big, complete Magic Photo Printing Outfit.

L. & M. MFG. CO.

Dept. 395, 229 W. Breckinridge, Louisville 3, Ky.

USED Correspondence Courses

Complete HOME-STUDY COURSES and self-instruction textbooks, slightly used. Rented, sold, exchanged. All subjects. 100% satisfaction. Cash paid for used courses. Full details & 100-page illustrated bargain catalog Free. Write Nelson Co., 321 S. Wabash Av., Dept. 2-06, Chicago 4, Ill.

get back, yuh're goin' to find a mighty nice buckskin hoss tied in the barn. Yuh're goin' to put our fanciest saddle and bridle on him. Then, like the gay caballero yuh are at heart, yuh're goin' to ride over to see Tonia. Yuh're young, Pete. And mighty handsome. And I'm darned if yuh're goin' to be an old bachelor like I am. Why, if it hadn't been for yore company. . . ." Bill's voice became husky.

Two days later Pedro pitched his camp at the foot of the Terraces, the abrupt series of ledge rock over which tumbled the bright, sun-glinting waters of Beaver Creek. Then, carrying his tackle—quite a fancy assortment of it now—he climbed the Terraces; nor did he stop until he had gained a point from which he could look across the mountain valley where beaver dams, placid and brown, were strung like amber beads along the silver thread of creek.

An expected agitation assailed the fisherman. He was like a pugilist who, having trained long weeks for a bout, was now within sight of the ring.

"Where do yuh thing you're goin'?"

Startled, Pedro turned and looked at a plump, lazy-gaited man moving from behind a tree. A man with a star on his vest, a rifle in his hands and a somewhat sinister glint in his pale blue eyes.

"What's wrong?" Pedro asked. "Why is a deputy sheriff watching this spot?"

"You go blunderin' into them willows down there along the crick and yuh might get yore head shot off—that's what's wrong, stranger."

"How come?"

"Because another man's hidin' somewhere's along that stream. He might not understand yuh're just a fisherman, and in spite of that riggin' yuh've got there. Me and my pard shot his hoss out from under him earlier this mornin', but he got away. We trailed him up here and—"

"Where's your pard?" Pedro asked.

"He's circling along the timber up there on the ridge. Yuh got a hoss?"

"Just an old team that—"

"Then yuh might have to ride a work hoss back to Pinetown and get me some more men. We'll see what my pard, Alex Marsh, thinks about it."

"He might not be back for a couple of hours," Pedro said. "In the meantime, I'll slip down to the stream and—"

"Come back here!" commanded Deputy Fleming, starting to lift his rifle. "I'm sworn to protect lives, and I will. Even if it's only the life of a trout-locoed Mexican!"

Pedro sat down on a rock, started jointing together the beautiful, expensive rod that Bill had given him last Christmas. He had to do something. He didn't dare look at those placid beaver dams, deep pools where lay the

"big ones" he'd heard about so much.

"Fetchin' fishin' junk up here instead of a gun!" grumbled Fleming. "I shore hope Alex locates that coyote, and drills him!"

"I'll bet you do," said Pedro, observing the deputy's nervousness. "Is that your horse grazing off up that hillside?"

"Yeah, and I'd better get him 'fore . . . I'll be right back."

It wasn't long before Pedro made for the willow-fringed creek, and vanished. He didn't give much thought to a hunted man who had probably fled from some minor offense. Pedro thought only of reaching that first beaver pond, of snaring one of those big trout he had heard about.

It wasn't far, nor had many minutes passed when Pedro's light pole whipped out and catapulted a fly hook so gently on the surface of that pool that it hardly make a mark. That colorful lure was scarcely damp when Pedro felt the strike of a twelve-inch trout, an electrifying impulse that vibrated through the fishing rod, and down the entire length of a born fisherman's spine.

The reel hummed; the light pole was a flexing semi-circle for a while. Then speckled silver flashed up from the water into the sunlight, and a trout flopped about the lush grass, at the fisherman's feet.

FROM that instant on, Pedro forgot all about hunted men and deputy sheriffs. Minutes ticked by. Another nice-sized trout was snared. But no dreamed-about four-pounder. Perhaps a different fly. . . . But they didn't work, either.

Pedro moved upstream to another promising spot, up to the fourth beaver dam. Again the line shot out five—ten times. The eleventh time there was a savage strike, but that was all. Eyes snapping with excitement, Pedro saw that the small hook had straightened under pressure. Hurriedly he put on a larger, stronger hook.

He was ready for another cast when he heard a sound behind him. He turned, saw a big red-faced man with graying hair stealthily crossing the stream below the fishing hole, stepping from one wet rock to another on a series which served as a bridge.

Pedro saw—and turned into a statue. This man with the slate-gray eyes, and with a six-shooter gripped in his grimy hand was no stranger!

It wasn't the song of a stream that Pedro heard now. It was the jarring sound of a man being smashed against a wagon tongue. It was the scream of lead whistling past a terror-stricken lad running for a patch of timber. It was the solemn voice of a judge saying, "I sentence you, Nick Cassideen—"

Yet, what Pedro actually heard now, was big Nick Cassideen saying, "Tell me where

[*Turn page*]

Satisfied with my JOB and PAY? *NOT ME!!*

"Some day I'll really get a break and go right on to the top."

That's wishful thinking.

You know that the "breaks" go to the man or woman who is prepared to take advantage of them—to the person who can fill the better job and is worth more money. He makes the "breaks" instead of waiting for them.

You can influence your own future by preparing now for the step forward—so that openings come because you are equipped for them—not as the result of luck.

Why not take the road that thousands of ambitious men and women have taken to help them to better jobs and more money.

Prepare now. Send the coupon below—check the business field of your choice and we'll send you without obligation our FREE 48-page book describing the opportunities and complete information on that field.

Send the coupon Now. It may be the turning point in your life to that better job and more money.

LASALLE Extension University

A Correspondence Institution

417 S. Dearborn St., Dept. 6329-R, Chicago 5, Ill.

I want to make my own "breaks" by preparing for a better job Send me your free 48-page booklet on the subject I have checked below.

☐Foremanship	☐Traffic Management
☐Accounting	☐Salesmanship
☐Bookkeeping	☐Law: LL.B. degree
☐C.P.A. Coaching	☐Business English
☐Industrial Management	☐Effective Speaking
	☐Stenotypy

☐ Executive Management

*Name*_____ *Age*_____

*Position*_____

*Address*_____

*City*_____ *Zone*____ *State*_____

NOW JUST $1 A MONTH
PROVIDES
CASH
WHEN YOU NEED IT MOST!
Accumulated CASH BENEFITS
Up To $6000.00
for Accidental LOSS OF LIFE, LIMBS or SIGHT!
Up To $2400.00
for ACCIDENT DISABILITY at rate up to $100 Monthly for as long as 24 months!
Up To $300.00
for SICKNESS DISABILITY at rate up to $100 monthly for as long as 6 months!
Up To $650.00
for HOSPITAL EXPENSES as a result of either sickness or accident!

AMAZING NEW GOLD SEAL POLICY

Provides *all-around* protection, cash for almost every emergency! Issued by old-line LEGAL RESERVE company, yet actually *costs less than* $1 a month. Protection you *need* at a *price you can afford!*

Pays for ANY and ALL Accidents, ALL Common Sicknesses, as provided, even minor injuries. Disability benefits paid from first day. No waiting period. NO, this is NOT the usual "limited" policy. NO jokers. NO trick clauses. It's *extra liberal!*

NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION

Policy issued BY MAIL at *big savings.* Ages 15 to 69. Actual policy sent for 10 DAYS' FREE EXAMINATION. Write for it today. No cost! No obligation! No salesman will call. Use coupon below. Do it today—Provide for tomorrow!

FREE 10-Day Inspection Coupon

The SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
446-I Service Life Bldg. Omaha 2, Nebr.

Without cost or obligation, send your GOLD SEAL $1-A-MONTH Policy for 10 DAYS' FREE INSPECTION.

Name_____
Address_____ Age_____
City_____ State_____
Beneficiary_____

LEARN MEAT CUTTING At Home—In Spare Time

Get into the vital meat industry. Concise, practical Home Training based on 25 years proven instruction method used at National's famous resident school. Prepares you for bigger pay as Meat Cutter, supervisor, market manager or more money in your own store. Go as rapidly as your spare time permits. Diploma. Start NOW to turn your spare hours into money. Send for FREE bulletin today. No obligation. National School of Meat Cutting, Inc., Dept. TG-9, Toledo 4, O.

CAN YOU SELL?

Connect For Bigger Earnings

MAKE Up To $40 Daily

If big money don't scare you—tie up now with R.S.B. Our plan is a natural. Give away giant size Dictionaries, Cook Books, Self Revising World Atlases, etc., with NATIONALLY FAMOUS MAGAZINES. Deals from $5.05 to $15.60. Big profits all year around. No saturation point to reading demand. GET SELLING OUTFIT! You take orders—we deliver.

542 S. Dearborn St.
Readers Service Bureau Dept. 106, Chicago 5, Ill.

PULVEX
FLEA POWDER
Kills fleas
25¢ AND 50¢
100% SATISFACTION ...OR MONEY BACK

yore hoss is, fisherman. He must be tied around here somewhere. Take me to him or I'll risk the noise of a shot to blow your cussed head off!" The slate-gray eyes were narrowed dangerously.

"My team is below the Terraces," Pedro said, hate blazing in his own dark eyes. "So the hunted coyote is Cassideen! If I'd known I'd have had you before now myself!"

"You!" growled the fugitive who had escaped from the penitentiary. "So you're that Mexican kid!"

It was obvious that Cassideen wanted to pull the trigger of a gun he had stolen a few days ago. Yet, if he did shoot, the echo of that shot would go ringing forth to reveal his exact whereabouts.

"That was a nice buckskin hoss Bill Lanning staked me to last night when I slipped into Broken Rock," Cassideen went on, in a low, taunting voice. "One he'd just bought. Lucky for me, too, that Lanning happened to be dividin' up some money in the old tin can he kept it in when I slipped into his cabin. And stuck a knife into him. Knives are quiet, you know."

"You lie like you once did in a courtroom!" Pedro answered, but there was a terrible doubt in his heart. And then rage swept over him like a red tide. Yet it was helpless rage.

"Yuh'll see," Nick Cassideen taunted. "After yuh walk back to Broken Rock. If yuh're able to walk. I'm sneakin' down to yore camp, takin' one of yore hosses. He'll do till I can get a better one."

Quickly, treacherously, the fugitive swung the six-shooter he dared not shoot. And he would have crushed another man's skull if Pedro hadn't moved just enough that the gun-barrel, instead of landing squarely, glanced off his head and smashed down upon his left shoulder.

Felled by that blow, Pedro rocked backward into the beaver pool. With a noisy splash, he sank into water four or five feet deep. Cassideen swore. He had wanted the tall, broad-shouldered Mexican to fall where he could hit him again with that gun-barrel. Well, the victim of that blow would probably lie there and drown.

The fugitive turned away. He had better get away from the commotion here, steal one of Pedro's horses and ride.

Cassideen started retracing his steps back across the creek again, using the same slick stones for a bridge. He was less than halfway across that stream when Pedro, quickly revived by the cold water into which he had plunged, came to his feet, gasped deeply.

Only a moment did Pedro hesitate. Then he grabbed up his fallen fishing rod. His right arm crooked. A large fish hook shot downstream with the speed of a winging dragon fly—and snagged at the gray flannel shirt the fugitive was wearing.

Fighting the pull of a suddenly taut line that had snared him by the back, Cassideen tried to keep his balance and, at the same time, whip his gun around into firing position. There was a shot. And a bullet clipped a willow sprig not four feet away from Pedro who was pulling hard on his strong, flexing pole.

CASSIDEEN'S position was precarious. He swayed atop the slick rock on which he stood. Pedro suddenly released his pull while Cassideen, his arms working like windmills, plunged into the stream. He had barely gained his feet when Pedro was on him, smashing a hard, hate-tightened fist to the face.

Cassideen swayed, managed to keep on his feet, but again he was caught by a savage blow to the mouth.

It was a fierce battle waged there in the middle of Beaver Creek. Both contestants knew that only one of them would emerge from that battle alive. Water dripped. And blood. Boots scuffed over wet rocks. Cassideen swore. Pedro was silent, grim, merciless. As merciless, in this moment of reckoning as Cassideen had once been with an old sheepherder called Tio Juan.

Cassideen, a cornered grizzly, tried to grab and clinch with an adversary who fought with all the deadliness of a tiger. But, if Cassideen fastened his big hands on Pedro, it was the convict who was on the bottom when the two tangled men crashed against the rock from which Cassideen had fallen. It was Cassideen's skull that collided with that rock.

Pedro dragged the limp man from the stream. He thrust a wet hand into Cassideen's bulging pocket and brought out a big roll of currency. Then he knew that Cassideen had not lied about robbing Bill Lanning.

That wild shot fired by Nick Cassideen soon brought Lew Fleming and Alex Marsh, another deputy, to the spot where Cassideen now lay dead.

"Did this coyote I killed stab Bill Lanning last night?" Pedro asked Marsh.

"Yeah, and bad," said Marsh. "But the doc says he has a chance. Take my bay hoss and get back to Broken Rock, Pedro. I'll drive yore team down, and haul this along." He pointed to Cassideen. . . .

It was sundown when Pedro, with the long miles behind him, and with a crushing anxiety in his heart, walked into the cabin behind the saddle shop in Broken Rock. Bill was lying on his bed. Beside him sat old Doc Frazier, a thin, white-haired little man.

Pale, wan, Bill mustered a smile.

"Catch any big ones, Pete?" he asked weakly.

"One, Bill." Pedro's voice was unsteady.

[*Turn page*]

UGLY BLACKHEADS OUT in SECONDS with
EVEN THESE ..EASILY
VACUTEX
BLACKHEAD EXTRACTOR
$1.00
Blackheads are ugly, offensive, embarrassing. They clog pores, mar your appearance, invite criticism. Now your blackheads can be removed in seconds, scientifically, and easily, without injuring or squeezing the skin. VACUTEX creates a gentle vacuum around the blackhead, cleans out hard-to-reach places in a jiffy.
SAFE • SURE
SANITARY
DAINTY
FAST
PLEASANT
Germ laden hands never touch the skin. Simply place the direction finder over your blackhead, draw back extractor . . . and it's out. Release extractor and blackhead is ejected. VACUTEX does it all! Don't risk infection, order today!
JUST 3 EASY STEPS
Yes, in a jiffy, VACUTEX removes blackheads, painlessly and harmlessly. You have blackheads—then apply VACUTEX, and then presto, chango, they're out.
10 DAY TRIAL OFFER
Don't wait until embarrassing criticism makes you act. Don't risk losing out on popularity and success because of ugly, dirt-clogged pores. ACT NOW! Enjoy the thrill of having a clean skin, free of pore-clogging, embarrassing blackheads. Try VACUTEX for 10 days. We guarantee it to do all we claim. If you are not completely satisfied your $1.00 will be immediately refunded.
BALLCO PRODUCTS COMPANY, Dept. 4306
19 W. 44 St., New York 18, New York
☐ Ship C. O. D., I will pay postman, $1.00 plus postage. My $1.00 will be refunded if I am not delighted.
☐ I Prefer to enclose $1.00 now and save postage. (Same guarantee as above.)
NAME .....
ADDRESS .....
CITY & ZONE .....STATE.....

Pays HOSPITAL BILLS for Whole Family

Costs 3c a Day for Adults
Only 1½c a Day for Children

It's here! The new Family Hospital and Surgical Expense Policy you need and want! One policy insures whole family—mother, father, children, anyone from 3 months to 65 years. No medical examination. Pays up to $510.00 hospital and surgical bills for EACH and EVERY person insured. Pays up to $100.00 doctors' fees for operations. Pays up to $50.00 for operating room, medicines, ambulance, etc. Covers sicknesses, accidents, operations, childbirth, female disorders, and many other disabilities not covered by other policies. You select your own doctor and hospital. This full-coverage Family Hospital and Surgical Policy issued DIRECT to you at special family rates by big, strong company with over $3,000,000.00 in assets. Investigate! SEND NO MONEY, but mail the coupon below quick for full details—sent FREE. No agent will call on you. Act today!

STERLING INSURANCE CO.
4689 Sterling Bldg., CHICAGO 11, ILL.
Send me your FREE INSPECTION Offer of LOW-COST Family Hospitalization Plan.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....

INVENTORS

Learn now—without obligation—how to protect and sell your invention. Secure Free "Patent Guide," containing complete information about patent procedure and selling inventions. Write

CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN & HARVEY JACOBSON
Registered Patent Attorneys
58-E Adams Building • Washington 4, D. C.

STAMMER?

This new 128-page book, "Stammering, Its Cause and Correction," describes the Bogue Unit Method for scientific correction of stammering and stuttering — successful for 44 years. *Free — no obligation.*

GET THIS FREE BOOK!

Benjamin N. Bogue, Dept. 4254, Circle Tower, Indianapolis 4, Ind.

RUPTURED Why Suffer Needless Pain? FREE

SEE THIS NEW PATENT INVENTION YOU'LL BE AMAZED AT RESULTS

Discover how you too can avoid the CONSTANT DANGER of a truss that doesn't hold and makes life miserable. Send for FREE Booklet "NEWLY PATENTED RUPTURE CARE." Tells all about VITA-PNEUMATIC NATURE-ADE* U. S. Reg. appliance. Positively no obligation to buy. Just fill in and

MAIL COUPON TODAY!

PNEUMATIC APPLIANCE, 103 Park Av., N.Y. 17, N.Y. Dept. 57-I
Send me free under plain seal and wrapper booklet "NEWLY PATENTED RUPTURE CARE." No obligation to buy.

Name.....

Address.....

PSORIASIS—ECZEMA

You Can Have a *Clean* Skin! It Is Possible!

With Non-Greasy Non-Staining **EN-EX** a liquid, applied externally

SENSATIONAL RESULTS REPORTED BY MANY!
ERUPTIONS VANISH OR MONEY BACK IN 2 WEEKS!

$1.00 regular size bottle. Send currency or Money Order, or sent C.O.D. Write TODAY!
Caution: Use only as directed.

"EN-EX" COMPANY
474 Society for Savings Bldg. • Cleveland, Ohio

"One named Cassideen." Then he told Bill what had happened.

"Snared him with yore hook, eh? Shake, fisherman." Bill tried to lift his hand, but he couldn't. "I've been hangin' on, Pete, waitin' for yuh to—" He stopped. "The shop's yores, Pete, if I can't make—" His voice trailed off.

"Don't—don't let him die, Doc!" Pedro cried to Frazier. His bruised hands were clenched. His dark eyes were moist. "He mustn't die just because he befriended a—a sheepherder's nephew!"

"He ain't goin' to—but he'd be happy if he did," said old Doc Frazier gently. "He's mighty proud of you, Pete. He says you're not only a fine saddle maker, but a fine man. Maybe that's why he had that new sign painted for the front of the shop, one that was put up yesterday—Lanning and Trujillo, Saddle Makers. Bill has just passed out. He'll be all right, give him time. Get along outside with you, now. You're all upset."

With churning emotions, Pedro stumbled out toward the corral.

Dimly he saw a slim, dark-eyed girl leaning against the barn.

"Hello, Pete," she said softly. She came toward him, laid her hand on his arm.

"Tonia! Why are you here?"

"I came when I heard Cassideen was loose and heading this way," she said. "I was afraid he would kill you, Pete. But you were gone. And I was late, anyhow."

"I wish Bill had been gone instead of me!" he said bitterly. "But thank God he's not gone forever!"

"This morning Bill told me that maybe you'd want me to stay here, Pete."

"Will you, Tonia?"

"Yes, Pete," she replied gently.

Pedro looked down into a pair of big, soft brown eyes. They were like twin stars of hope shining against the horizon over which the sun of this never-to-be-forgotten day had set.

Next Issue: PIRATES ON HORSEBACK

WHAT CAN YOU SPARE THAT THEY CAN WEAR?

MILLIONS of suffering men, women and children in the war-ravaged lands have a desperate need for used, serviceable shoes, garments and bedding.

To meet this need, more than 50 voluntary war relief agencies and UNRRA are participating in the United National Clothing Collection, April 1-30, of which Henry J. Kaiser is the national chairman.

Take your contributions to the collection depot nearest your home. Your newspaper and radio will announce the locations of receiving depots.

THE FRONTIER POST

(Continued from page 6)

re-sealed, replaced in the mail sack and hung on a mesquite tree beside the road. He then informed the Brownsville authorities where it could be found.

But this polite deed did not exonerate him. The next organized effort to get Cortinas was made by a force of Texas Rangers under Captain W. G. Tobin. They tried to oust him from his Santa Rita ranch headquarters. They weren't enough people, the Rangers weren't. They were defeated, returning bloodily to Brownsville.

A State of War

Mexicans throughout lower Rio Grande Valley were flocking to Cortinas' cause by this time. Practically a state of war existed. Or a rebellion. Only Cortinas wasn't rebelling against just and lawful authority. He declared his confidence in Governor-Elect Sam Houston and said all he wanted was justice for his people.

Sam Houston was impressed. But in December, five months after the drunken peon incident, United States troops were sent to Santa Rita.

Cortinas' insurrectos avoided a battle. They scattered into the brush. They pillaged and burned ranches that had been wrested from them under arbitrary authority. They raided towns and restored confiscated property to its former owners.

The Mexicans excelled in this sort of guerrilla warfare. The troops couldn't fight an enemy who refused to face them. Other bodies of Rangers were put on Cortinas' trail but they failed too. Passive resistance of the Mexican population made their task a hopeless one.

It was time for what should have been done in the first place. That is, a study of conditions and some reasonable measures of correction taken.

Enter Robert E. Lee

Detailed to this belated investigation was a young Lieutenant-Colonel, then commander of that Army department. Who do you reckon he was, gals and galluses?

His name was Robert E. Lee.

The upshot of Lee's survey was a correction of wrongful conditions. But that didn't clear Cortinas of his campaign of open banditry. So long as he remained on American soil, this Red Robber of the Rio Grande was a public enemy.

And so Cortinas withdrew into Mexico. The Texas difficulty ended. But Cortinas' fame and prestige wasn't wasted. He became a brigadier-general in the Mexican Army.

But even yet his star of destiny had not risen to its zenith. Being a man of strong convictions and willing to fight for his ideals, his influence spread in Mexican politics.

One day, a few years later, Brownsville gasped on learning that Cortinas had become Governor of the Mexican State of Tamaulipas.

The loss of Rancho Santa Rita was a small matter now, *ne importa*. His power had given

[*Turn page*]

4 WAYS To Be Your Own Boss!

NOW, more than ever before, is the **right** time to start a small profitable business of your own... or train yourself for a practical money-making trade in which you can be **independent.** TODAY take your first step, without cost or obligation. Just mail coupon—and by return mail you will get full information on the courses listed here.

watch and clock repairing

Learn at Home—In Your Spare Time

Prepare for a happy future of prosperity, security... and get a big-pay job now. Fascinating, high-grade occupation. You can **EARN WHILE YOU LEARN.** Excellent field for part-time work at home.

Practical Course in HOROLOGY

Thorough self-instruction training in American and Swiss watches, clocks. Special sections on alarm clock repairs. Interesting. LEARN-BY-DOING instruction method. Learn **QUICKLY,** easily. No previous experience necessary. WATCHMAKING IS BASIC TRAINING FOR AIRCRAFT INSTRUMENT WORK and other scientific precision jobs.

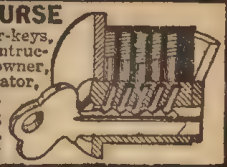
Amazing Low Price! ● ***Money-Back Guarantee!***

Get into this fast-growing field NOW... big opportunity... don't delay. Mail coupon below for **FREE** information. No obligation.

locksmithing and key making

PRACTICAL UP-TO-DATE COURSE

How to pick locks, de-code, make master-keys, repair, install service, etc. New, self-intruction lessons for every handy man, home-owner, carpenter, mechanic, service station operator, fix-it shop, hardware dealer, gunsmith.



53 Easy Illustrated Lessons

Low Price! Satisfaction guaranteed or money back. Write now... no obligation!

practical RADIO servicing

SELF-INSTRUCTION COURSE

Teaches you the **practical** side of radio.. repair, adjustment, operation, alteration, trouble-shooting. No previous knowledge necessary. Large clear illustrations, diagrams, charts, etc. ● **INTERESTING STEADY WORK!** Set up a radio repair shop of your own—or prepare for booming industrial electronics. This useful, how-to-do-it course brings you all the fundamentals, including mathematics, review questions, problems, answers. Strictly up-to-date. Low price. Coupon below will bring you full information you want immediately. Mail it in today!

MAIL ORDER BUSINESS

Your Big Opportunity!

84-lesson course on proved, tested, up-to-date, **profitable** methods. Amazing treasure-house of the best mail order plans and practices. How to start your mail order business on a small one-man scale... how to keep it growing more and more profitable month after month. Money-making FACTS.

WRITE FOR COMPLETE DETAILS ON ANY OF THESE COURSES. Send Coupon for World-Famous Copyrighted Success-Catalog—IT'S FREE!

NELSON CO., Dept. 8F06, 321 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago 4, Ill.

FREE details . . . mail coupon!

NELSON CO., Dept. 8F06, 321 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago 4, Ill.

Please send me—FREE and without obligation—illustrated Success-Catalog containing information about the course (or courses) I have checked below. No salesman will call.

☐ Watch and Clock Repairing. ☐ Locksmithing and Key Making.
☐ Practical Radio Servicing. ☐ Mail Order Business.

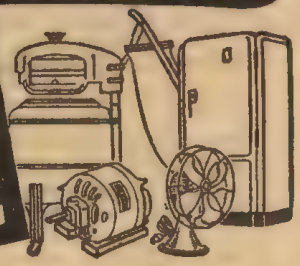
NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ STATE_____

HERE'S A NEW AND VITAL BUSINESS!

LEARN ELECTRICAL APPLIANCE REPAIRING



Offers Big Money — Independence

If you are mechanically inclined—can hold and use tools it will pay you to learn electrical appliance repairing. Operate from your garage, basement, etc. Work as many hours as you wish—the appliance repairman is his own boss. On many types of repairs it is usual for a repairman to charge on the basis of $5.00 to $6.00 an hour!

No Previous Experience Needed

Profusely illustrated our new course shows you in simple, easy to understand language plus drawings and photographs, how to make each repair on refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, motors, fans, irons, etc., etc. Explains and gives you a working knowledge of electricity, welding, nickel plating, etc. Shows you how to build the power tools you need and how to solicit and keep business coming to you. Not a theory course but an honest to goodness practical course written by and used by repairmen the country over. Price of course is so low that the savings on your own household appliances will pay for it. Act now! Send today for FREE literature. Christy Supply Co., 2835 N. Central Ave., Dept. D-604, Chicago 34, Illinois.

Protect Entire Family Against HOSPITAL Bills

Certificate Paying Up to $325 FREE

Sent for FREE Inspection

$1 A MONTH FOR ADULTS

25¢ A MONTH FOR CHILDREN

Protect yourself against bills from sickness or accident requiring hospital care. Including your family, lowers cost per person. Pays liberal benefits on hospital room and board, surgeon or doctor bills, X-Rays, many other items. Write today for FREE INFORMATION. No obligation; Postcard will do.

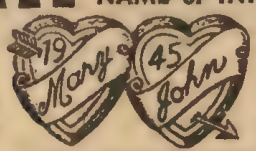
Atlas Mutual Benefit Assn., Dept. 19-F8, Wilmington, Del.

DETECTIVES

TRAINING—SECRET INVESTIGATIONS—FINGER PRINTS

Easy Method—Short Time. By Former Government Detective—Reward. Home—Travel—Secret Code-Booklet FREE—WRITE, INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE SYSTEM, 1701-T Monroe St., N.E., Washington, D.C. 18.

FREE — ENGRAVING — NEW NAME or INITIALS on 1945



Write For Catalog

14k Gold Finish FRIENDSHIP PIN

Send 42 cents, plus 8c Federal Tax, in Coin, Stamps or Money Order.

TASH NOVELTY ENGRAVING CO.

1301 SURF AVENUE, DEPT. 145-L, BROOKLYN (24), N.Y.

ANY PHOTO ENLARGED

Size 8 x 10 Inches on DOUBLE-WEIGHT PAPER

57¢

Same price for full length or bust form, groups, landscapes, pet animals, etc., or enlargements of any part of group picture. Original returned with your enlargement.

3 for $1.25

SEND NO MONEY Just mail photo, negative or snapshot (any size) and receive your enlargement, guaranteed fadeless, on beautiful double-weight portrait quality paper. Pay postman 57c plus postage—or send 59c with order and we pay postage. Take advantage of this amazing offer now. Send your photos today.

STANDARD ART STUDIOS

100 East Ohio Street Dept. 405-G Chicago (11), Ill.

him new affluence. He was a bandit in Texas but in Mexico he was a big shot. As champion of the downtrodden and oppressed, Cortinas had gained success and distinction.

He probably never returned north of the Rio Grande. If he did, the fact was unrecorded. In these later days, Texas had bigger troubles. So did Robert E. Lee. For the War Between the States raged in that most furious of all struggles among people bound together by blood ties and a common heritage, in a cause that eclipsed that of Cortinas and dimmed the memory of his deeds.

Texas was the backdoor of the Confederacy and through the young rivermouth port of Brownsville supplies flowed in what was then enormous quantities.

Disorganized frontier defenses occasioned by the Civil War brought other troubles to Texas, by comparison with which the Cortinas raids seemed trivial.

Indian Outbreaks

These were Indian outbreaks in the west and north. Far-flung ranch communities were terrorized. Indian troubles continued until the late 1870s. Sherman and Sheridan rounded up the last raiders and returned them to their reservations.

Much Indian trouble sprang from the same source as the "Red Robber" episodes—unfairness.

At the close of these hostilities came one of the most ironic tragedies of the Indian wars. Yellow Bear, Comanche chief famous for his fierce raids against white settlers, visited Fort Worth, then a frontier town and went to bed in a hotel—after blowing out the gas light.

Yellow Bear, who had bravely risked his life in many a battle, never awakened.

Barbed Wire

The invention of barbed wire closely followed the end of the Texas Indian troubles. J. F. Glidden patented the idea in 1874 and the first barbed wire fence was strung in the Texas Panhandle a short time afterward.

I've been some surprised, in confabs with city-dwelling gals and galluses, to learn that they didn't know about modern fencing which is appearing in ranch regions of Texas and elsewhere. It's electrified fence, the current supplied from a battery. Each wire gives a mild, intermittent shock on the contact of man or beast, thus discouraging any effort to bust it down.

The new electric fence is a heap more humane than barbed wire, which ruined much livestock in its day, especially horses. And the number of shirts and pants seats ripped on barbed wire, if charged up to Inventor Glidden, would have put him in the poorhouse in a hurry.

I could add a few items of expense my own self, to say nothing of a leg scar I've toted around for many years.

Another notion held by city gals and galluses is that gangsters are something new. The town of Shelbyville in east Texas claims, but without pride, the first gang war, and it happened one hundred years ago.

At that time Shelbyville occupied part of a strip between Texas and Louisiana known as

the Neutral Ground. Here drifted crooks of all sorts—rustlers, highwaymen, slave stealers, land pirates, counterfeiters and slippery gamblers.

Under one notorious John Murrell these undesirables ganged together, flouting the law and terrorizing honest citizens. They called themselves "Clan of the Mystic Confederacy."

The Regulators

To thwart them another body called the Regulators was organized. But the Regulators got a bad reputation. So then a gang called Moderators was formed to fight both the Mystic Clan and the Regulators. Feudal warfare raged, the courts were defied and the Regulators took the town of Shelbyville, lock, stock and barrel.

In 1844 President Houston of the young republic of Texas sent the militia. The three gangs were disbanded. And a few years later, their enmities were forgotten and they all became known as loyal Texans.

That's all for now—see you next issue, when we'll have another chat, folks!

—CAPTAIN STARR.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

THERE was trouble in the Nueces region of Texas. An old cattleman named John Vance was ruthlessly shot and killed by a henchman of Adam Tilscher and Red Dog Ince. Ince was the builder of a dam closing off the river from the ranchers in the valley and taking their water supply away from them.

Red Dog Ince told Frank Powers, of the Triangle 2, that he expected to collect five cents a barrel for the water he supplied the ranchers. The owner of the Triangle 2 pro-

[*Turn page*]

America's Best Dime's Worth of Picture Entertainment

NOW ON SALE AT ALL STANDS

Now for EVERY WORK SHOP!

NEW *Invention* **Electroplates by BRUSH**

Easy to Plate CHROMIUM
GOLD, SILVER, NICKEL, COPPER
. . . For Pleasure and Profit!

If you have a workshop—at home or in business—you need this new Warner Electroplater. At the stroke of an electrified brush, you can electroplate models and projects—you can replate worn articles, faucets, tools, fixtures, silverware, etc.—with a durable, sparkling coat of metal . . . Gold, Silver, Chromium, Nickel, Copper or Cadmium. Method is easy, simple, quick. Everything furnished—equipment complete, ready for use. *By doing a bit of work for others, your machine can pay for itself within a week.* So make your shop complete by getting a Warner Electroplater right away. Send today for FREE SAMPLE and illustrated literature. ACT AT ONCE! *Mail Coupon.*

WARNER ELECTRIC CO., DEPT B-140
360 North Michigan, Chicago 1, Illinois

FREE *Details & Sample!*

WARNER ELECTRIC CO., 360 N. Michigan, Chicago 1, Dept. B-140
Gentlemen: Send Free Sample and Details to:
*Name*_____
*Address*_____
City *State*

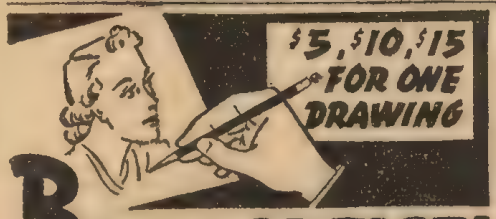
Store Route Plan PAYS BIG MONEY

SELL COUNTER CARD PRODUCTS
Build a good-paying business of your own! Call on dealers of all kinds; show nationally-advertised Aspirin, Vitamins, Cosmetics and 200 other necessities. Big 5c and 10c retail packages, high quality. Attractive counter displays sell goods fast. Free book gives amazing facts. Write!
World's Products Co., Dept. 73-J, Spencer, Ind.

"For the SPARK that NEVER Fails"

At drug and cigar stores, PX and Ship's Service.

ROCK FLINT CO., 123 Doughty Blvd., Far Rockaway, N.Y.



Be an ARTIST!

—Train at Home in Your Spare Time

The fascinating field of Art offers commercial opportunities to men and women. COMMERCIAL ART, CARTOONING, DESIGNING all in one complete course. We prepare you step-by-step. Trained Artists are capable of earning $30, $50, $75 a week. Colorful FREE BOOK. "Art for Pleasure and Profit—" describes course and method of instruction. TWO ART OUTFITS included with training. State age.

WASHINGTON SCHOOL of ART, Studio 666P
1115—15th St., N. W. WASHINGTON 5, D. C.

FREE BOOK gives details

LIMITED QUANTITIES

Electric Stoves
1-Burner and 2-Burner

Electric Steam Irons
Automatic Electric Irons
Electric Irons

RADIOS, A.C. & D.C.
Table & Console Models

Electric Room Heaters
Infra-Red Health Lamps
Desk Lamps—Bed Lamps

Electric Food and Cream Mixers
Electric Toasters Electric Broilers

Schick Electric
Shavers
and Others

Carpet Sweepers
Electric Vacuum Cleaners

Electric Sandwich Toasters

Electric Roasters All Sizes
Electric Waffle Bakers

Silverware for Home Use
Silverware for Restaurants
Electric Fans, All Sizes
Electric Wire, All Sizes
Heater Elements
Iron Elements
Cooker Elements
Screen Wire All Sizes

Send Stamped Return Envelope for Prices

JOSEPH WINKLER & CO., Dept. Y-6
667-671 N. CLARK ST. CHICAGO 10, ILL.

10K GOLD RINGS
Genuine Diamond

"PERFECT MATCHED WEDDING SET"

These Rings contain Genuine Diamonds, mounted in solid 10K yellow Gold. We offer a 10-day trial —satisfaction or your Money Back! For a limited time only—$5.95 each or the "Bridal Pair" Only $10.95 plus 20% tax. Send No Money—When your Rings arrive, pay postman. Act Now! Genuine Diamonds solid Gold rings. Gift box free.

VICTORY DIAMOND CO.
Dept. T-8, Saint Clairsville, Ohio

BE A *Nurse*

MAKE $30-$40 A WEEK

You can learn practical nursing at home in spare time. Course endorsed by physicians. Thousands of graduates. 46th yr. One graduate has charge of 10-bed hospital. Another saved $400 while learning. Equipment included. Men, women 18 to 60. High School not required. Easy tuition payments. Trial plan. Write today.

CHICAGO SCHOOL OF NURSING
Dept. 425, 100 East Ohio Street, Chicago 11, Ill.
Please send free booklet and 16 sample lesson pages.

Name.....
City.....*State*.....*Age*.....

tested that this would mean ruin for the ranchers—but his protests meant nothing to Ince.

For a time the situation looked better for the cattlemen, when Ed Owens, a young man who had been raised in farm country and was now learning to be a good cowhand on the Triangle 2, got the idea of building windmills to draw water out of the ground. Owens built one windmill—and then he disappeared!

It was this general set-up that Jim Hatfield discovered at the start of PIRATES ON HORSEBACK, the exciting book-length novel by Jackson Cole in the next issue of TEXAS RANGERS.

Here is just a sample of the drama and action of this swift-moving story:

It was Jim Hatfield who first fired—he felt compelled to drive Powers back, in an attempt to save the rancher from the drygulchers Ince had set below. The Ranger Colt banged sharply and the carefully aimed bullet snipped a chunk of felt from the high Stetson crown on Frank Powers' head.

The single shot had a tremendous effect. Instantly warned and realizing Ince had gunmen set for him, Powers ripped at his reins—his big horse reared on its hind legs, and as Ince's drygulchers quickly let go, a bullet hit the animal but Powers was saved. He slipped his feet from the tapped stirrups and leaped off, protected by the mustangs of his friends, who began shooting at the lower windows.

Hatfield, after getting off the warning, had jumped back from the window. A couple of bullets slammed through, as one of Powers' waddies had glimpsed the Ranger when he had fired.

"Time to sashay," decided Hatfield, picking up his pack and making for the door into the upstairs hall.

Guns were crashing the afternoon quiet of the settlement, and confused cries of anger and alarm joined the fracas. Powers and the Triangle 2 were moving out of danger.

The steps to the lower floor were toward the rear. As he went to them Hatfield could look over the railing. He saw two men with Colts in hand starting up the stairs.

"Huh—must've figgered where my shot came from," Hatfield decided.

He put down his pack, pressed back against the brown wall. The two men hit the landing and turned away, the first a yard ahead.

"Who the—"

They were against the light of the back window giving out onto a lean-to roof at the alley.

"You fool, why'd you fire that one at Powers—you spilt the beans!" growled the man in the lead.

The two men suddenly realized Hatfield was a stranger, and their guns rose.

Forced to resist, Hatfield's revolver jumped to his slim trained hand. He beat Ince's fighter to the shot and the gunny staggered, whirling about at the shock of the bullet puncturing between shoulder and arm. A shriek burst from his throat, and his eyes were blinded by tears of pain.

His friend swung hastily, swearing as he saw how it was—the Ranger's big gun was turning on

FOR VICTORY

Buy
UNITED STATES
WAR SAVINGS
BONDS and STAMPS
Every Payday!

him and he changed his mind about what to do. Instead of fighting he gave a squeak of fright and dove over the railing, rolling in a ball downstairs. . . .

And that's just one of the many exciting incidents in PIRATES ON HORSEBACK. It is a yarn featuring Jim Hatfield at his fighting, quick-thinking best—packed with suspense from start to finish.

There will also be a number of entertaining shorter Western stories and features in the next issue of TEXAS RANGERS. Captain Starr will be on hand for another gab-fest, too —plenty of fine reading fare for everyone!

OUR MAILBOX

WE KEEP right on getting interesting letters—so many of them, in fact, that we can't possibly acknowledge them all in this department. However, we want to keep on hearing from all of you. Tell us which stories you liked best, and also about those which did not suit your fancy. Your opinions help us plan future issues!

Let's look over some of the fine letters we have been receiving.

I picked up a TEXAS RANGERS magazine the other day and read my first Jim Hatfield story.

[*Turn page*]

Read Our Companion Western Magazines

THRILLING WESTERN
THRILLING RANCH STORIES
RODEO ROMANCES
WEST
POPULAR WESTERN
EXCITING WESTERN
MASKED RIDER WESTERN
THE RIO KID WESTERN
RANGE RIDERS WESTERN

Now on Sale at All Stands

LINCOLN AND INDIAN HEAD
PENNIES WANTED
WILL PAY **$10.00 EACH** FOR CERTAIN LINCOLN PENNIES!
Indian Head Cents $50.00; Nickels $500.00 Dimes $1,000.00. All rare coins, bills, stamps wanted! Send 10c for Illustrated Catalogue showing coins wanted.
FEDERAL COIN EXCHANGE, 4-TG, COLUMBUS 5, OHIO

NEW SECURITY PLAN PAYS HOSPITAL & DOCTOR BILLS . . .
Costs only 3¢ a day!

PROTECTS YOU IN CASE OF SICKNESS OR ACCIDENT

INDIVIDUAL or FAMILY
Insure NOW, before it's too late! Protect your savings against Hospital expense. Here's an amazing offer of safe, dependable coverage under America's most popular Hospitalization Plan. Family or Individual eligible. No Medical Examination. When sickness or accident strikes, you may go to any Hospital in U. S. or Canada under any Doctor's care. YOUR EXPENSES WILL BE PAID exactly as Policy specifies. WAR coverage included. The Company under supervision of the Insurance Dept. No agent will call.

CASH BENEFITS INCLUDE
Hospital Expenses for Accident up to **$540.00**
Hospital Expenses for Sickness (beginning 7th day) up to **$540.00**
Doctor Expenses for Accident up to **$135.00**
Loss of Time from Work up to **$300.00**
Accidental Death **$1000.00**
War Coverage & other valuable benefits.

MAIL COUPON AT ONCE!

NORTH AMERICAN MUTUAL INSURANCE CO.
Dept. TG5-6, Wilmington, Del.
Please send me, without obligation, details about your "3c A Day Hospitalization Insurance Plan."

Name .....
Address .....
City ..... *State* .....

EASY PAYMENT PLAN
LIFE INSURANCE

New low-cost "buy-by-mail" Budget Plan enables you to own Life Insurance backed by Legal Reserves, to suit your pocketbook! You don't have to pay more than you can afford for reliable protection. Policy provides full benefits for as little as 5c a week! 10c a week pays double benefits; 15c pays triple benefits, etc. So economical, so easy to own, you and every member of the family can afford an individual Pioneer Life Insurance Policy! No Red Tape—NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION! No agent will call. Get complete details FREE! Write today.

AS LITTLE AS 5¢ WEEKLY

Policy Provides

DEATH BENEFITS
Due to Sickness or Natural Causes

DOUBLE INDEMNITY
For Accidental Death

TOTAL DISABILITY

CASH SURRENDER VALUE

EXTENDED INSURANCE
Other Liberal Benefits

PIONEER LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
1292 Pioneer Building • Rockford, Illinois

Free for Asthma During Summer

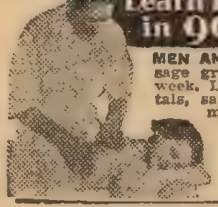
If you suffer with those terrible attacks of Asthma when it is hot and sultry; if heat, dust and general muginess make you wheeze and choke as if each gasp for breath was the very last; if restful sleep is impossible because of the struggle to breathe; if you feel the disease is slowly wearing your life away, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Co. for a free trial of a remarkable method. No matter where you live or whether you have any faith in any remedy under the Sun, send for this free trial. If you have suffered for a life-time and tried everything you could learn of without relief; even if you are utterly discouraged, do not abandon hope but send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing. Address

Frontier Asthma Co. **378-R Frontier Bldg.**
462 Niagara St., **Buffalo 1, N. Y.**

PICTURE RING $1.

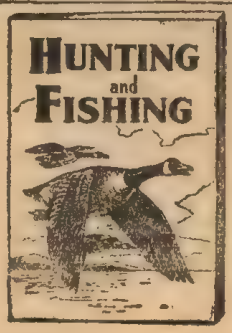
Exquisite Onyx-like Picture Ring—made from any photo. **Send No Money!** Mail photo with paper strip for ring size. Pay postman only $1.00 plus postage. Hand tinted 25c extra. Photo returned with ring. Money back guarantee. Send photo and ring size now. PORTRAIT RING CO., Dept. H-26, CINCINNATI, O.

Made from Any Photo or Picture! SEND NO MONEY!



Learn Profitable Profession in 90 days at Home

MEN AND WOMEN, 18 TO 50—Many Swedish Massage graduates make $50, $75 or even more per week. Large full time incomes from doctors, hospitals, sanatoriums, clubs or private practice. Others make good money in spare time. You can win independence and prepare for future security by training at home and qualifying for Diploma. Anatomy Charts and 32-page Illustrated Book FREE—Now! THE College of Swedish Massage, Dept. 563C, 100 E. Ohio St., Chicago 11, Ill.



HUNTING and FISHING

is a monthly magazine crammed full of hunting, fishing, camping, dog and boating stories and pictures, invaluable information about guns, fishing tackle, game law changes, best places to fish and hunt — countless ideas that will add more fun to your days afield.

Special Trial Offer

Send 25c in stamps or coin and we will send you Hunting & Fishing for six months.

HUNTING & FISHING MAGAZINE
287 Sportsman's Building
Boston **Massachusetts**

Boy! Have I been missing a lot of good reading! Jackson Cole is sure a fine writer. There is a good assortment of short stories, too. One which I liked especially well was Allan K. Echols' yarn about Chili Joe. I think that Jim Hatfield should stay single, but either way the tide turns I'm going to be a steady reader of TEXAS RANGERS from here on out.—*W. Council Harden, Jr., Tampa, Fla.*

We're sure glad you liked the magazine so well, and thanks a lot for your letter. Doesn't seem like there's much danger of Jim Hatfield getting married at present—though some of our readers do think it would be a good idea if he wre romantically interested in some girl. As an example:

Being a Texan myself I can really appreciate TEXAS RANGERS. I've read the book for quite some time, and like many others Jim Hatfield is my favorite fiction cowboy. The stories are more entertaining when there is a girl mixed up somewhere along the line. At least I think so!—*Mrs. Jeanette Creed, Van Nuys, Calif.*

Thanks for your letter, Mrs. Creed. There usually is a girl somewhere in the TEXAS RANGERS novels—and no doubt that does add to their interest.

Here's a letter from a reader who certainly uses some interesting lingo:

Load up yore guns, pards, and start shootin' before I can dodge behind that big rock yonder. Yuh asked for opinions so I'm gonna speak right out and give mine. In the first place I sometimes like the short stories in TEXAS RANGERS a lot better than I do the featured novels. Sometimes Jim Hatfield is just too wonderful to suit me whatever. So yuh know what I do? I just sit around champing at the bit until the next issue of TEXAS RANGERS comes out.—*James Lang, Boston, Mass.*

Sorry our novels sometimes don't please you, Mr. Lang—wish you had told us just which novels you meant. Glad to hear from you. Anybody else with complaints? Come right along! Both praise and criticism are welcome. We're glad to say, however, that the overwhelming majority of the letters we receive are complimentary to Jim Hatfield.

That's all for this time, but let's hear from more of you readers. Please address all your letters and postcards to The Editor, TEXAS RANGERS, 10 East 40th Street, New York, 16, New York. Thanks, all of you. See you next issue.

—THE EDITOR.

IMPORTANT NOTICE!

Wartime paper rationing makes it impossible to print enough copies of this magazine to meet the demand. To be sure of getting YOUR copy, place a standing order with your regular newsdealer.

NEXT ISSUE'S NOVEL

•

JIM HATFIELD

IN

PIRATES ON HORSEBACK

By JACKSON COLE

PLASTICS
TRAINED MEN NEEDED IN NEW, ESSENTIAL INDUSTRY

Plastics is a great new industry and the time to get started in it is *now*. Opportunities are unlimited. In your spare time, at home, you can prepare to enter this important field. A new, practical training plan is now ready to help you realize your ambitions and win success. Send name and address *today* for FREE information.

AMERICAN SCHOOL, Dept. PA58
Drexel Ave. at 58th St., Chicago 37, Ill.

City, State.....

Name.....

Street.....

do you WORRY?

Why worry and suffer any longer if we can help you? Try a Brooks Patented Air Cushion. This marvelous appliance for most forms of reducible rupture is GUARANTEED to bring YOU heavenly comfort and security—day and night—at work and play—or it costs you NOTHING. Thousands happy. Light, neat-fitting. No hard pads or springs. For men, women, and children. Durable, cheap. **Sent on trial** to prove it. Not sold in stores. Beware of imitations. Write for Free Book on Rupture, no-risk trial order plan, and proof of results. All Correspondence Confidential.

ABOUT RUPTURE

Brooks Company, 182-T State St., Marshall, Mich.

ANALYZE HANDWRITING

Earn C. G. A. Degree, Earn money analyzing handwriting, in business or HOME, full or spare time, in your own Vocational and Personal Problem Service. Successful experts show you HOW. 3000 word illustrated lesson and GRAPHO ANALYST free. . . . ADDRESS A.I.G.A., INC., 113, JOPLIN, MO.

Borrow by MAIL $30 to $300.00

ON YOUR *Signature* ALONE!

NO security required! NO co-signers! NO salary assignments! $30 to $300.00 BY MAIL *on your signature alone.* Character and earning ability the only requirement. Nationwide service. Fast, courteous, confidential.

LOW COST LOANS! STATE LICENSED AND BONDED COMPANY

Take as long as 12 months to repay. Interest charged only for time you have the money, and at Iowa's LOW LAWFUL RATE. Loans completed QUICKLY. No red tape. No embarrassing investigation. If you need cash quickly or will need it soon, write for loan papers today. State name, address and occupation.

POSTAL FINANCE CO. DEPT. 25C · SIOUX CITY 5, IOWA

EYE-GLASSES

Try *by MAIL* Now

SEND NO MONEY!

Test Your Own Sight at home with our $ New Patented Sight Testers. GLASSES as low as 2.95 Complete

NEWEST STYLES!

16 DAYS' TRIAL Offer!

MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE If you're not 100% satisfied with glasses we make for you, we'll refund every cent you pay us.

Repairs: 48-hour Service FREE CATALOG and SCIENTIFIC Test Chart. Write

UNITED STATES EYE-GLASSES COMPANY
1557 MILWAUKEE AVE., DEPT. 6-82, CHICAGO, ILL.

"YOU ARE UNDER ARREST!"

THERE'S A THRILL IN BRINGING A CROOK TO JUSTICE THROUGH SCIENTIFIC

CRIME DETECTION!

I have taught thousands this exciting, profitable, pleasant profession. Let me teach you, too, in your own home. Learn Finger Printing, Firearms Identification, Police Photography and Secret Service Methods thoroughly, quickly, and at small cost.

53% of All American Bureaus of Identification employ students and graduates of I. A. S. You, too, can fit yourself to fill a responsible crime detection job with good pay and steady employment. But don't delay—get the details now. Let me show you how easily and completely I can prepare you for this fascinating work, during spare time, in your own home. You may pay as you learn. Write today . . . Now . . . Be sure to state age.

Be A FINGER PRINT Expert

FREE!!! Send for Thrilling "BLUE BOOK OF CRIME"

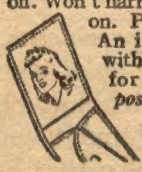
INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE
1920 Sunnyside Ave. • Dept. 796-A • Chicago, Ill.

PRINT ANY PHOTO

ON PAPER, CLOTH, LEATHER OR WOOD

SIMPLE, EASY TO USE

Magic liquid takes only 2 minutes to reproduce any snapshot on to stationery, handkerchiefs, ties, scarfs, etc. Use same picture over and over again if you wish. Won't wash off. Won't harm negative or fabric it's used on. Personalize your belongings! An ideal gift. Complete outfit with full colors included, enough for 100 photos—*only $1.00 postpaid.* Sent C.O.D. for $1.21



CHRISTY PHOTO SUPPLY
Dept. 919, 2835 N. Central, Chicago 34, Ill.

LAW

STUDY AT HOME for PERSONAL SUCCESS and LARGER EARNINGS. 35 years expert instruction—over 108,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All texts furnished. Easy payments. Send for FREE BOOK.
AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 54-T, 646 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.

FREE ENLARGEMENT of your Favorite Photo

FROM FAMOUS HOLLYWOOD FILM STUDIOS

Just to get acquainted we will make a beautiful 5 x 7 enlargement of any picture or negative. Be sure to include color of hair, eyes and clothing and get our bargain offer for having your enlargement beautifully hand colored in oil and mounted in your choice of handsome frames. Please enclose 10c and your original picture or negative will be returned with the free 5 x 7 enlargement postpaid. Act now! Limit 2 to a customer.

HOLLYWOOD FILM STUDIOS
7021 Santa Monica Blvd., Dept. 644, Hollywood, Calif.

MEN

This Horseshoe Ring, Handmade, Hand-engraved, inlaid with simulated pearl, is a KNOCKOUT! Shoe and shank of everlasting Monel Metal is

GUARANTEED 20 YEARS

Supply is limited . . . rush your order! SEND NO MONEY. Pay Postman only $3.85, plus excise tax and postage. Return for refund in five days if not delighted. State size. Address:

Dept. 442-H
AMERICAN JEWELRY CO., Wheeling, W. Va.

THERE is a definite I.C.S. type. The records of 100,000 current students . . . nearly 5 million students since 1891 . . . supply the outlines. Here's how the typical enrollee shapes up at the time of beginning his studies:

He is an adult. In wartime he is in the Armed Forces or in vital production. But war or peace, good times or bad times, he is an employed man. Circumstances have prevented his attending a college but he is ambitious, intelligent, determined to acquire the specialized training that will help him in his present job and prepare him for a better one.

Does the description fit *you?* Then you'll be interested in what I.C.S. helps these students to achieve. In a single 30-day period we have received as many as 635 student letters reporting advancement in salary and position. In a period of 120 days we have received 1,920 such reports.

Graduates include the presidents, board chairmen, chief engineers or chief chemists of some of the largest steel, airplane, chemical, railroad and electrical equipment companies in the country. Thousands of others have registered substantial successes in their chosen fields. Here's the kind of coupon they signed and mailed.

are you the I. C. S. type of man?

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

ICS

BOX 3966-D, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X:

Air Conditioning and Plumbing Courses
- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Heating ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Refrigeration ☐ Steam Fitting

Chemistry Courses
- ☐ Chemical Engineering
- ☐ Chemistry, Analytical
- ☐ Chemistry, Industrial
- ☐ Chemistry, Mfg. Iron & Steel
- ☐ Petroleum Refining ☐ Plastics
- ☐ Pulp and Paper Making

Civil Engineering, Architectural and Mining Courses
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Bridge and Building Foreman
- ☐ Building Estimating
- ☐ Civil Engineering ☐ Coal Mining
- ☐ Contracting and Building
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ Lumber Dealer
- ☐ Reading Structural Blueprints
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Structural Engineering
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping

Electrical Courses
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Power House Electric
- ☐ Practical Electrician
- ☐ Practical Telephony
- ☐ Telegraph Engineering

Internal Combustion Engines Courses
- ☐ Auto Technician ☐ Aviation
- ☐ Diesel-Electric
- ☐ Diesel Engines ☐ Gas Engines

Mechanical Courses
- ☐ Aeronautical Engineering
- ☐ Airplane Drafting
- ☐ Flight Engineer
- ☐ Foundry Work
- ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals
- ☐ Industrial Engineering
- ☐ Industrial Metallurgy
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Mold-Loft Work
- ☐ Patternmaking
- ☐ Reading Shop Blueprints
- ☐ Sheet-Metal Drafting
- ☐ Sheet-Metal Worker
- ☐ Ship Drafting
- ☐ Ship Fitting
- ☐ Shop Practice
- ☐ Steel Mill Workers
- ☐ Tool Designing
- ☐ Welding, Gas and Electric

Radio Courses
- ☐ Electronics
- ☐ Radio, General
- ☐ Radio Operating
- ☐ Radio Servicing

Railroad Courses
- ☐ Air Brake ☐ Car Inspector
- ☐ Locomotive Engineer
- ☐ Locomotive Fireman
- ☐ Railroad Section Foreman

Steam Engineering Courses
- ☐ Boilermaking
- ☐ Combustion Engineering
- ☐ Engine Running
- ☐ Marine Engineering
- ☐ Steam Electric
- ☐ Steam Engines

Textile Courses
- ☐ Cotton Manufacturing
- ☐ Rayon Weaving
- ☐ Textile Designing
- ☐ Woolen Manufacturing

Business and Academic Courses
- ☐ Accounting ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Arithmetic ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Certified Public Accounting
- ☐ College Preparatory
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ Cost Accounting
- ☐ Federal Tax
- ☐ First Year College
- ☐ Foremanship
- ☐ French
- ☐ Good English
- ☐ High School
- ☐ Higher Mathematics
- ☐ Illustrating
- ☐ Motor Traffic
- ☐ Postal Service
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Secretarial
- ☐ Sign Lettering ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Stenography
- ☐ Traffic Management

Name..... *Age*..... *Home Address*.....

City..... *State*..... *Present Position*..... *Working Hours* ..... *A.M. to*..... *P.M.*

Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada.
British residents send coupon to I. C. S., 71 Kingsway, London, W. C. 2, England.

DISCOUNT TO DISCHARGED VETERANS—SPECIAL TUITION RATES FOR MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES

Men! Ladies! Here's THE JACKET Youve Wanted At a Sensational Saving!

LADIES'—You'll Love It!

Take this jacket for carefree ease—and for that certain poise which being "in the know" on style gives you! That new low hipline is a "flash" from the fashion front. Perky shoulders! Suave yoke! You will adore its smart distinctive lines . . . you will always enjoy its caressing warmth. It's tailored of favorite Spun-Rite, justly popular for its wear . . . for its beauty! It will be your prop and mainstay, season in, season out. Select yours from one of these seasons latest shades: Camel Tan or Liberty Red. Sizes 12 to 20.

MEN'S — Ideal for Sports-Leisure

Here's a sturdy "he-man's" jacket of a thousand and one uses that will keep pace with the fastest tempo of your busy day. Cut for real comfort—of "Spun-Rite" —magically flexible, water-repellent and shape-retaining as well as warm. Snappy yoked back. Genuine leather buttons for looks and wear. Grand, deep, saddlepockets. Split sides—so stride along as you will. You'll live in it from dawn 'til night. Choose Camel Tan with the following choice of harmonizing colors: Forest Green or Luggage Brown. Check your size from 34 to 50 on the order coupon below.

Ladies! Men! Here's the Jacket "buy" you've been waiting for. Here's quality, style, comfort and durability all combined in one to give you the finest, smartest jacket you'll find anywhere, regardless of price. And when you order the two together — one lady's and one man's jacket— you get two jackets for only $7.95.

Save 95c! Everyone — wife and husband, girl-friend and beau will want to order matching jackets in combination on this special bargain offer. You SEND NO MONEY! We'll ship C.O.D. plus a few cents postage. If you don't agree this is the greatest Jacket Bargain you've ever seen for the price; return it within 10 days and your money will be cheerfully refunded.

SEND NO MONEY

Just Fill Out and Mail This Handy Order Coupon Today

ILLINOIS MERCHANDISE MART, Dept. 1893-A
500 N. Dearborn St., CHICAGO 10, ILL.

Gentlemen: Send me the SPUN-RITE Jackets indicated below C.O.D. I must be fully satisfied with my purchase or will return within 10 days for refund.

Name ..... Please

Address ..... write

City ..... State ..... plainly

LADY'S JACKET Sale Price $3.95	Camel Tan	Liberty Red
Check color wanted		

Combination Price for 1 Man's & 1 Lady's Jacket Both only $7.95

MEN'S JACKET Sale Price $4.95	Camel Tan with these colors	Luggage Brown	Forest Green
Check color wanted			

CHECK SIZES WANTED
LADY'S 12☐, 14☐, 16☐, 18☐, 20☐ MAN'S 36☐, 38☐, 40☐, 42☐ 44☐, 46☐, 48☐, 50☐

MY TOTAL PURCHASE AMOUNTS TO: $.....C. O. D.

BUY
U. S. WAR BONDS
AND STAMPS

Baby Ruth candy makes delicious cookies

CURTISS CANDY
Baby Ruth
RICH IN DEXTROSE
CURTISS CANDIES

RECIPE ON EVERY WRAPPER

IF HE'S IN AMERICA
SEND A BOX TO
THE BOY IN CAMP

CURTISS CANDY COMPANY • Producers of Fine Foods • CHICAGO 13, ILLINOIS